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THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

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21
IRON MAN
DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D.
KNAUF
DE LA TORRE
WHITE

WHEN BILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK DONS SOPHISTICATED STEEL-MESH ARMOR OF HIS OWN DESIGN, HE BECOMES A LIVING HIGH-TECH WEAPON--THE WORLD'S GREATEST HUMAN FIGHTING MACHINE.

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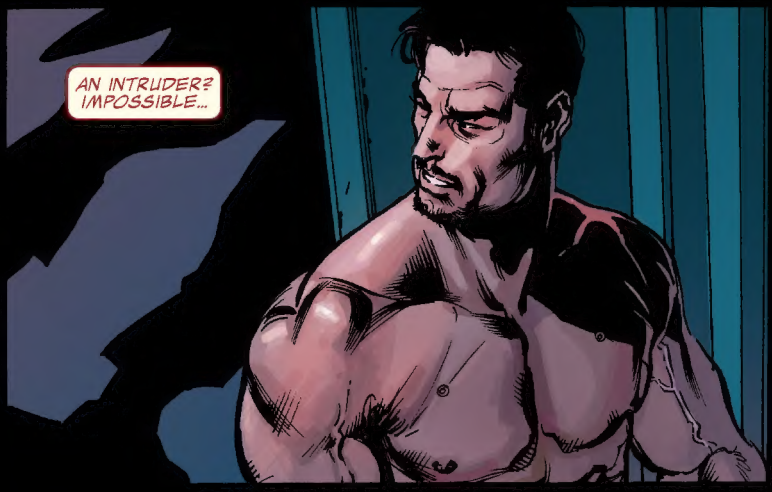
LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER FALSE ALARM...
NO TRESPASSING
NEBRASKA M.U.D.
MILLARD WELLFIELD
FEEL A LITTLE STUPID, WASTING YOUR TIME AGAIN LIKE THIS, PARAGON.
DAMN PERIMETER SENSORS TRIP EVERY TIME A GOPHER FARTS...
S'OKAY, DEX. BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY.
STILL, KINDA WEIRD HAVIN' HONEST-TO-GOD SUPER HEROES SHOWING UP OUT HERE IN THE BOONIES...
JUST PART OF THE NEW JURISDICTIONAL RULES UNDER THE INITIATIVE...
ANY PROBLEM AT A POTENTIAL TERRORIST TARGET, WE GOTTA CHECK IT OUT FIRST.
THIS WELLFIELD PROVIDES DRINKING WATER FOR A BIG CHUNK OF OMAHA.
WHAT'S THAT BUILDING OVER THERE?
OH, THAT...?
THE OLD PUMPING STATION. BEEN OUTTA COMMISSION FOR YEARS...
DANGER
KEEP OUT

HELL. THIS PLACE IS SUPPOSED TO BE LOCKED UP TIGHT...
STAY OUTSIDE, DEX. GADGET AND I'LL HAVE A LOOK.
YOU WANNA BORROW MY FLASHLIGHT?
NO. WE'RE COOL...
ANYBODY HOME?
SWITCHING TO INFRARED...
BOGIE. THREE O'CLOCK. IN THE CORNER...
YOU. BEHIND THE MACHINE. STEP OUT SLOWLY WITH YOUR HANDS UP...

BEHIND THE MACHINE...?
I AM NOT THE ONE BEHIND THE MACHINE...
THE MACHINE IS... BEHIND YOU, CHILD.
GRAVITON!
MY GODDDD NNNNOOOO...!
NO! DON'T! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
NO!!!
KRAKOOOM!

STARK TOWER, NEW YORK
SUDDENLY, I'M AWAKE. WHY? I DON'T KNOW...


AN INTRUDER? IMPOSSIBLE...

WHO ARE YOU?

YOU KNOW WHO I AM.
NO!
UHN!

WHAT THE...
URGHH...
NO...IT CAN'T BE...
YOU'RE RIGHT, TONY...
...I'M JUST A FIGMENT OF YOUR IMAGINATION.
WHAT...WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I WANT YOU TO PAY ATTENTION...
THE WRITING IS MALUKKIAN.

GAH!
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE JACK KOONING'S OFFICE, WASHINGTON, D.C.
INTERESTING. MIND IF I SEND THIS DOWN TO OUR CRYPTOGRAPHY UNIT?
DON'T BOTHER...
THERE'S ONLY ONE MAN ON THE PLANET WHO'S DECIPHERED MALUKKIAN SCRIPT...
...THE MANDARIN.
HE'S DEAD.

MEDICAL LOGS WE SEIZED FROM AN HO INDICATE THAT A JOHN DOE WAS ADMITTED WITHIN MONTHS OF THE MANDARIN'S DISAPPEARANCE--
--DEATH--
--DISAPPEARANCE. HIS BODY WAS NEVER RECOVERED.
THIS PATIENT-- THIS JOHN DOE-- WAS LOCKED UP UNDER THE STRICTEST SECURITY. AND GET THIS...
...HE HAD...NO... HANDS.
BEFORE HE DISAPPEARED, NAJEEB HAD PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD SEARCHING FOR WHAT HE CALLED "ANCIENT TRIBAL ARTIFACTS."
STORIES VARY, BUT SEVERAL SOURCES SAY THE "ARTIFACTS" WERE RINGS.
TEN RINGS!
SO WHAT?
SO WHAT IF THEY WERE AN OFFERING? QUID PRO QUO...
NAJEEB RETURNS THE RINGS OF POWER TO THE MANDARIN, HOPING TO FORGE SOME KIND OF ALLIANCE--
AN ALLIANCE? WITH THE MANDARIN? THAT'S CUTE.
EXACTLY! THE MANDARIN'S GOT HIS OWN AGENDA. NAJEEB IS KILLED.
NAJEEB'S BODYGUARD, DARIUS FARAZ, STARTS WORKING FOR THE MANDARIN, RECRUITING TERRORIST CELLS AND PUMPING THEM UP WITH ADVANCED BIOMODS.

FOR SIX MONTHS, WE'RE PUTTING FIRES OUT ALL OVER THE WORLD. BUT THAT'S JUST A FEINT!
THE MANDARIN WAS DISTRACTING US FROM WHAT HE WAS REALLY AFTER.
WHICH WAS...?
MAYA HANSEN.
EXTREMIS...
INTERESTING THEORY.
SETTING ASIDE FOR THE MOMENT THAT, BY ALL ACCOUNTS, YOUR MAIN SUSPECT IS WORMFOOD, THERE'S JUST TWO SMALL PROBLEMS...
NUMBER ONE: FARAZ WAS APPREHENDED IN AFGHANISTAN. HE CONFESSED TO OUR PEOPLE AT GUANTÁNAMO, TOOK RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ENTIRE OPERATION--
AND YOU BOUGHT THAT?
THE MAN GAVE NAMES, DATES. THEY ALL CHECK OUT. WE HAVE CORROBORATING TESTIMONY FROM OVER A DOZEN WITNESSES--
--MOST OF WHOM ARE UNDER INDICTMENT AS INTERNATIONAL TERRORISTS. YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO DO BETTER THAN THAT, JACK.
FINE. PROBLEM TWO...
...MY PEOPLE LOCATED MAYA HANSEN FIVE HOURS AGO...

"...HER BODY WAS DISCOVERED BY A MAID IN THE BATHROOM OF A PARIS HOTEL.
"A SUICIDE NOTE WAS RECOVERED. INTERPOL GRAPHOLOGISTS HAVE CONFIRMED HER HANDWRITING...
My research has caused nothing but death. I've lost everything I've ever loved. Dear Sal, I'm so sorry I failed you.
"FINGERPRINTS MATCH. DENTAL RECORDS MATCH. D.N.A. IS PENDING, BUT AT THIS POINT, JUST A FORMALITY..."
STARK...?

IT'S TIME TO STOP CHASING GHOSTS.
INCOMING PRIORITY MESSAGE FROM HILL, MARIA.
YES?
WE'VE GOT A SITUATION...
OMAHA, NEBRASKA
S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER
AS WITH THE STAMFORD DISASTER, SOURCES SAY THE TWO YOUNG HEROES, RECENT GRADUATES OF THE INITIATIVE TRAINING CENTER AT CAMP HAMMOND, WERE HOPELESSLY MISMATCHED AGAINST A VASTLY MORE POWERFUL ADVERSARY...
AT LEAST ONE SECURITY GUARD WAS KILLED IN THE INCIDENT, WHICH LEFT HOMETOWN HERO PARAGON LISTED IN CRITICAL CONDITION AT CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER...
A SECOND TEAM MEMBER, GADGET, REPORTEDLY A PERSONAL PROTEGE OF TONY STARK, IS STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR.
ALSO WOUNDED WAS THE SUSPECT, FRANKLIN HALL, A.K.A. GRAVITON, WHO WAS TAKEN INTO FEDERAL CUSTODY.
DO NOT CROSS
POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

FOR MANY, THIS TRAGEDY RAISES A NUMBER OF TROUBLING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SUPER HERO INITIATIVE AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ITS TRAINING METHODS--
KLIK
"FOR MANY." YEAH. I BET.
WHAT DO WE KNOW?
THREE DAYS AGO, FRANKLIN HALL, A.K.A. GRAVITON, ESCAPED CUSTODY WHILE BEING TRANSFERRED FROM A SECURE MEDICAL FACILITY TO THE 42 INTAKE STATION IN UPSTATE NEW YORK.
HOW?
UNKNOWN. HE WAS UNDER HEAVY SEDATION. THE AGENTS ESCORTING HIM WERE KILLED.
WHAT THE HELL WOULD BRING GRAVITON TO NEBRASKA?
MAYBE HE'S A HUSKERS FAN.
OH-TWO-HUNDRED. LUCY CERVANTES, AKA GADGET, AND COOPER ROTH, AKA PARAGON, RESPONDED TO AN ALARM OUT AT THE MILLARD WELLFIELD OUTSIDE OMAHA.
THINGS DID NOT GO WELL.
PARAGON IS STANDARD-ISSUE META. THE USUAL POWERS: SUPER-STRENGTH, SPEED, MODERATE INVULNERABILITY... NOTHING OVER "B" CLASS.
GADGET WAS A BRAIN. SELF-MADE, HER POWERS INHERENT IN A TECHNO-SUIT SHE'S BEEN TWEAKING SINCE SHE WAS SIX YEARS OLD...

WHERE WAS ULTRA?
CAPTAIN ULTRA WAS MANNING THEIR HEADQUARTERS DOWNTOWN...
...BY THE TIME I GOT PARAGON'S DISTRESS CALL, IT WAS TOO LATE.
ANY WORD ON GADGET?
NOTHING. THEY'RE STILL CLEARING DEBRIS. BUT AT THIS POINT...
WHAT?
THEY'VE SHIFTED THEIR FOCUS FROM SEARCH AND RESCUE TO BODY RECOVERY.
I HEAR YOU AND GADGET WERE TIGHT.
ACTUALLY, WE NEVER MET.
I THOUGHT SHE WAS YOUR PROTÉGÉ.
Querido Mr. Stark
My name is Lucy Cervantes and you are my hero. When I get older, I want to be Iron [redacted] Girl.
I've already built armor and everything.
Large Box
Fragile
"YEAH. HER AND ABOUT A MILLION OTHER GIFTED KIDS WHO COBBLE TOGETHER ARMOR IN THEIR GARAGES...
"SHE DID BETTER THAN MOST. MADE THE GRADE FOR INITIATIVE TRAINING..."

DAMN SHAME...
IF I'D ONLY BEEN THERE, WE COULDA TAKEN HIM DOWN.
SO WHY WEREN'T YOU?
OH, I GET IT... SO THAT'S THE WAY IT'S GONNA BE: BLAME THE HAS-BEEN.
IT'S A QUESTION, GRIFF, NOT AN ACCUSATION. AND NOBODY'S CALLING YOU A HAS-BEEN--
DON'T HAND ME THAT, STARK!
YOUR PEOPLE SEND ME OUT TO PASTURE IN FREAKIN' NEBRASKA. NEBRASKA!
YOU WANNA KNOW WHAT KINDA ACTION WE GET IN NEBRASKA?
FALSE ALARMS! AND THAT'S WHAT WE THOUGHT THIS WAS. THIRD ONE AT THIS LOCATION IN THE PAST MONTH ALONE!

IF I'D... IF I'D HAD ANY IDEA THAT IT WAS... WAS FREAKIN' GRAVITON--
GENTLEMEN...?
HE'S AWAKE, BUT HE'S STILL CONCUSSIVE.
YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES.
I JUST WANNA GET OUTTA HERE AND BACK ON THE STREET.
DON'T WORRY, COOP. DOCTOR SAYS YOU'LL BE GOOD TO GO IN A DAY OR TWO.
WHAT WE NEED NOW IS A BLOW-BY-BLOW. EVERY DETAIL.
IT'S ALL STILL... I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH...
Creighton
Medical Cente
"THE PLACE WAS UNSECURED. GADGET TOOK POINT. WE DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING UNDER VISIBLE SPECTRUM, SO SHE ENGAGED INFRARED...
"...ALMOST RIGHT AWAY, SHE PICKED UP A HEAT SIGNATURE."
BOGIE. THREE O'CLOCK. IN THE CORNER...

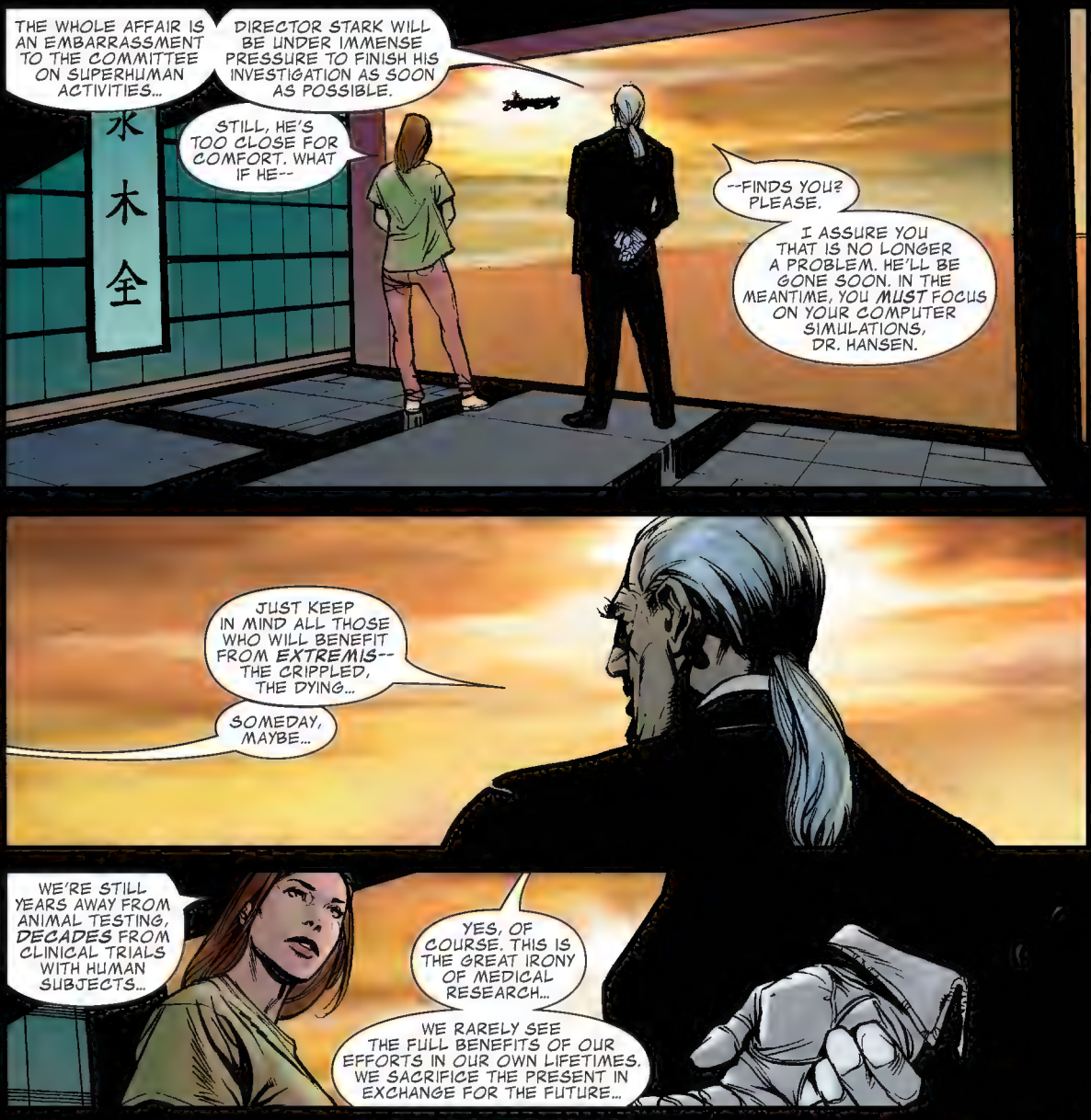
"IT WAS GRAVITON. HE SNAGGED HER IN SOME KIND OF FORCE-FIELD. SHE WAS PARALYZED...
MY GODDDD
NNNNOOOO...!
NO! DON'T! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
"I REMEMBER SCREAMING...
NO!!!
"...THEN AN EXPLOSION... THEN..."
...THEN NOTHING UNTIL I CAME TO.
I'M SORRY, GENTLEMEN. YOUR TIME IS UP. THE DOCTOR HAS ORDERED STRICT BED REST--
JUST ONE MORE QUESTION.
DID GRAVITON SAY ANYTHING BEFORE THE ATTACK?

NO. NOTHING THAT MADE SENSE. JUST...
GADGET TOLD HIM TO FREEZE. "HEY YOU, BEHIND THE MACHINE," SHE SAID. AND HE SAID...SOME KIND OF WHACK STUFF ABOUT HOW THE MACHINES WERE BEHIND US...
THIS IS CRITICAL. I NEED TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT HE SAID. WORD-FOR-WORD.
HE SAID... I THINK IT WAS...
HE SAID, "THE MACHINE IS BEHIND YOU, CHILD."
DUGAN, SCRAMBLE A TECH-TEAM WITH MASS-ANALYSIS SCANNERS, STAT, AT GROUND ZERO.
YESSIR.
TELL THEM TO FOCUS ON THE MATERIAL THAT'S ALREADY BEEN REMOVED FROM THE BLAST SITE.
PROGRAM SCANNERS TO DETECT MATERIAL WITH A MINIMUM DENSITY OF EIGHT KILOGRAMS PER CUBIC CENTIMETER...
MAIN ENTRANCE
BUT THERE'S ALREADY DOZENS OF INVESTIGATORS COMBING GROUND ZERO FOR GADGET'S BODY...
WHAT DO YOU EXPECT TO FIND?!

TWO HUNDRED AND FOURTEEN POUNDS OF FLESH, BONE, SILICON AND STRATEGIC ALLOYS...
...COMPRESSED BY UNIMAGINABLE GRAVITATIONAL FORCE INTO THE SIZE OF A BILLIARD BALL...
HE'S INSANE.
GRAVITON? OH, YEAH. HE'S NUTS.
WHAT A HORRIBLE WAY TO DIE.
NOT PARTICULARLY...
...GIVEN THE VELOCITY OF THE FORCE NECESSARY FOR COMPRESSION, THE ENTIRE EVENT PROBABLY OCCURRED VERY QUICKLY.
NANOSECONDS, REALLY.
GRANTED, SHE MIGHT HAVE EXPERIENCED SOME DISCOMFORT AS THE FIELD WAS POWERING UP--
--NO MORE THAN ABOUT A MILLION OTHER GIFTED KIDS WHO COBBLE TOGETHER ARMOR IN THEIR GARAGES...

WHO'S BEHIND THE MACHINE, TONY?
WHAT'S WRONG...?
DIRECTOR STARK?
WHERE'S GRAVITON?

IN FEDERAL CUSTODY AT THE TECUMSEH STATE SUPERMAX UNIT.
HE'S IN A DRUG-INDUCED COMA. THEY'RE PREPARING HIM RIGHT NOW FOR TRANSFER TO 42.
ACTIVATE THE P-11 CELL IN THE HELICARRIER BRIG AND PLACE A MEDICAL TEAM ON STANDBY.
ACCOMPANY ALPHA UNIT TO TECUMSEH.
INFORM THE FEDS THAT UNDER SUB-CHAPTER 12, PARAGRAPH B OF THE SUPERHUMAN INITIATIVE ACT, GRAVITON IS TO BE TRANSFERRED INTO S.H.I.E.L.D. CUSTODY.
AND IF THEY DON'T COMPLY?
THEN YOU'RE AUTHORIZED TO SEIZE HIM BY FORCE.
PROMETHEUS GENTECH, INC. EXECUTIVE OFFICE.
YOU SAID THEY'D BE GONE BY NOW.
PATIENCE, DEAR. MY SOURCES INFORM ME THAT THE ENTIRE EPISODE IS AN OPEN-AND-SHUT CASE...


THE WHOLE AFFAIR IS AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE COMMITTEE ON SUPERHUMAN ACTIVITIES...
DIRECTOR STARK WILL BE UNDER IMMENSE PRESSURE TO FINISH HIS INVESTIGATION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
STILL, HE'S TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT. WHAT IF HE--
--FINDS YOU? PLEASE.
I ASSURE YOU THAT IS NO LONGER A PROBLEM. HE'LL BE GONE SOON. IN THE MEANTIME, YOU MUST FOCUS ON YOUR COMPUTER SIMULATIONS, DR. HANSEN.
JUST KEEP IN MIND ALL THOSE WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM EXTREMIS-- THE CRIPPLED, THE DYING...
SOMEDAY, MAYBE...
WE'RE STILL YEARS AWAY FROM ANIMAL TESTING, DECADES FROM CLINICAL TRIALS WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS...
YES, OF COURSE. THIS IS THE GREAT IRONY OF MEDICAL RESEARCH...
WE RARELY SEE THE FULL BENEFITS OF OUR EFFORTS IN OUR OWN LIFETIMES. WE SACRIFICE THE PRESENT IN EXCHANGE FOR THE FUTURE...
"...A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ALL MANKIND."

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In Omaha, Nebraska, one such Initiative team experiences a mysterious attack on two of its members. The attack is apparently caused by the mentally-unstable villain Graviton and results in the death of young hero Gadget, and the hospitalization of her teammate, Paragon.

While Stark investigates, he is visited by apparitions of those he has lost, including Captain America and Maya Hansen, recently reported dead from suicide. Though he knows they are figments of his imagination, Stark cannot make them go away.

Meanwhile, the Mandarin, heading the top-secret Prometheus Gentech laboratories, has been testing the effects of Extremis on animals. He is preparing to experiment on human subjects, and is aided by the brilliant and very-much-alive Maya Hansen…

HAUNTED

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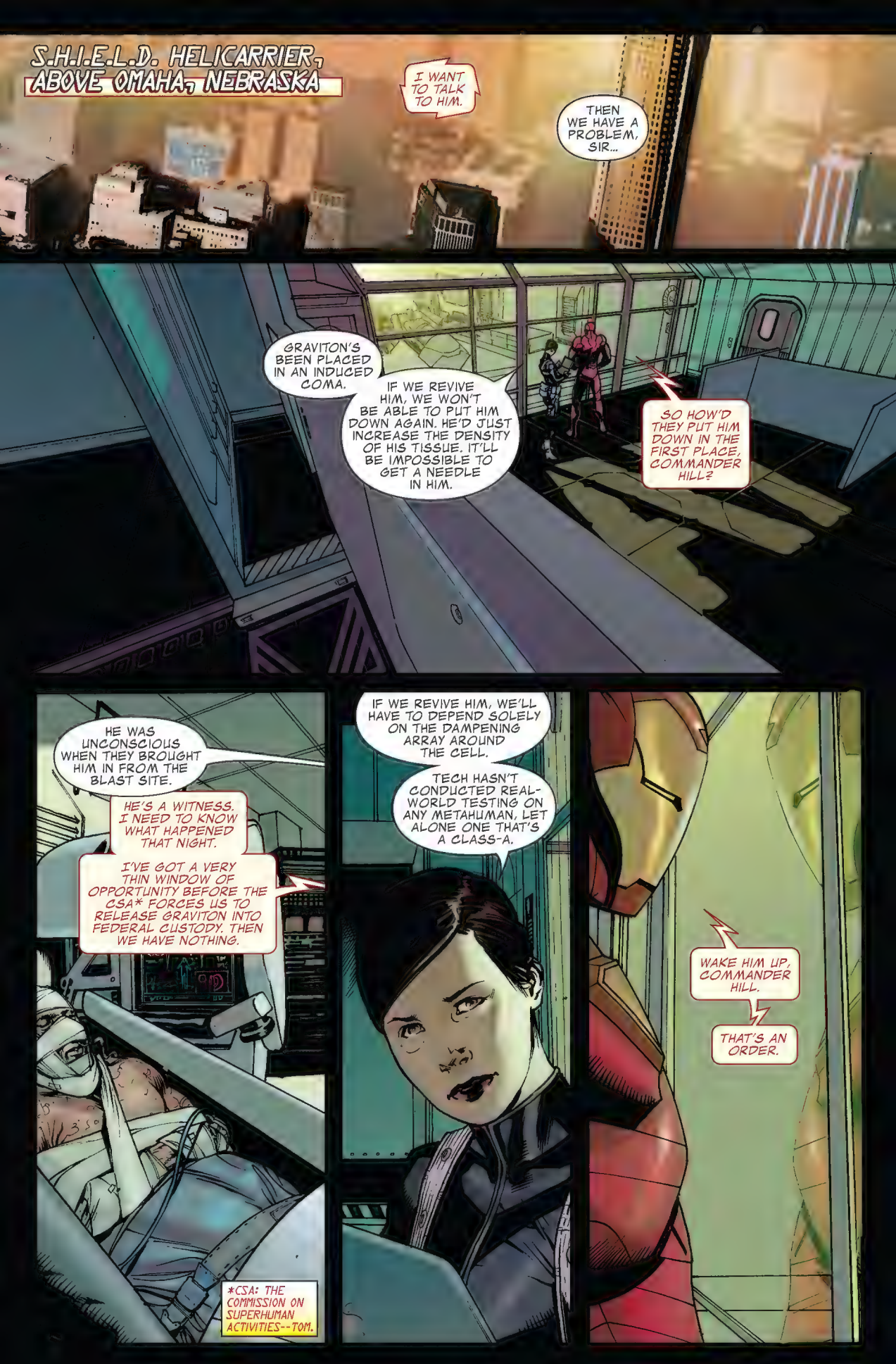
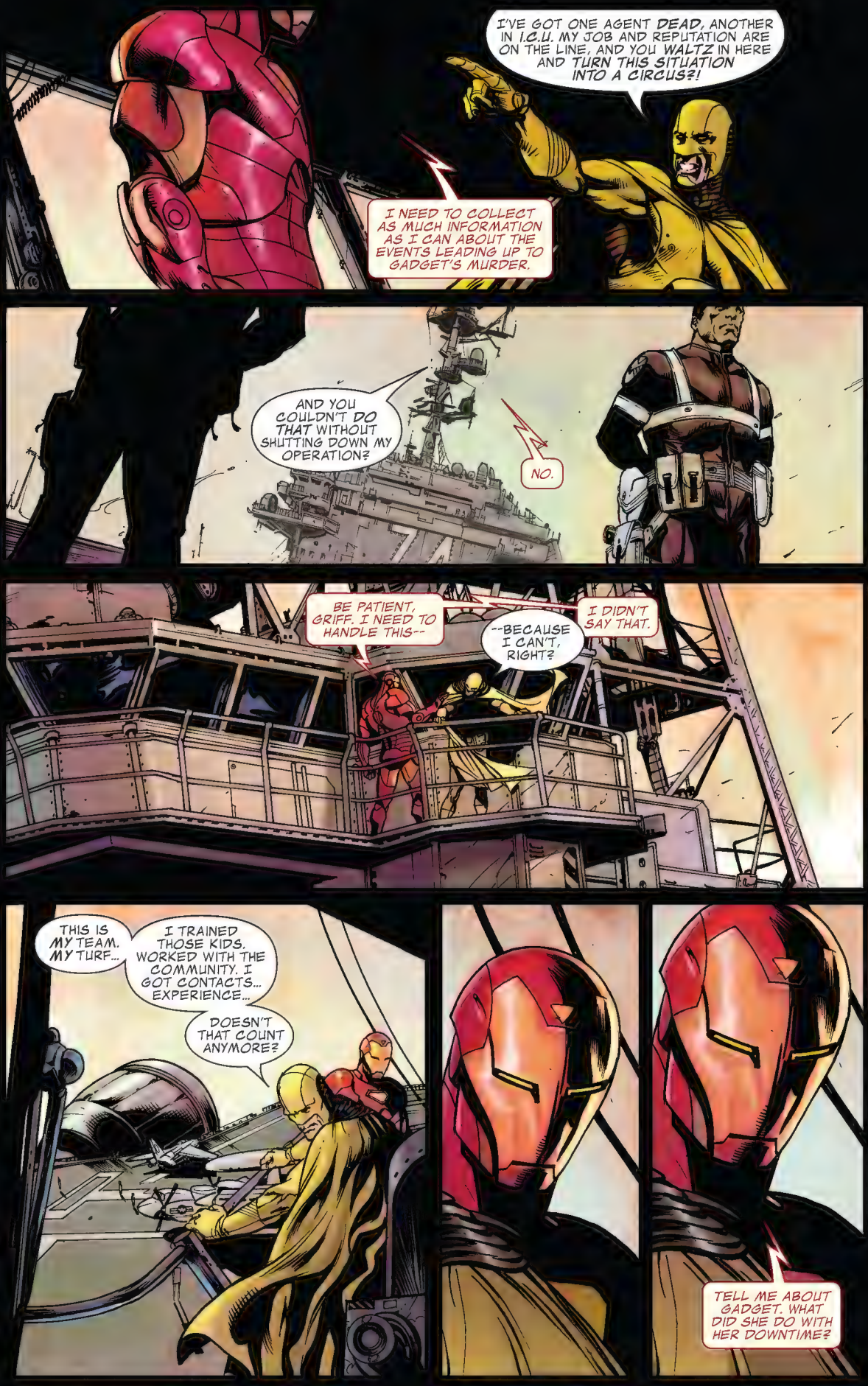
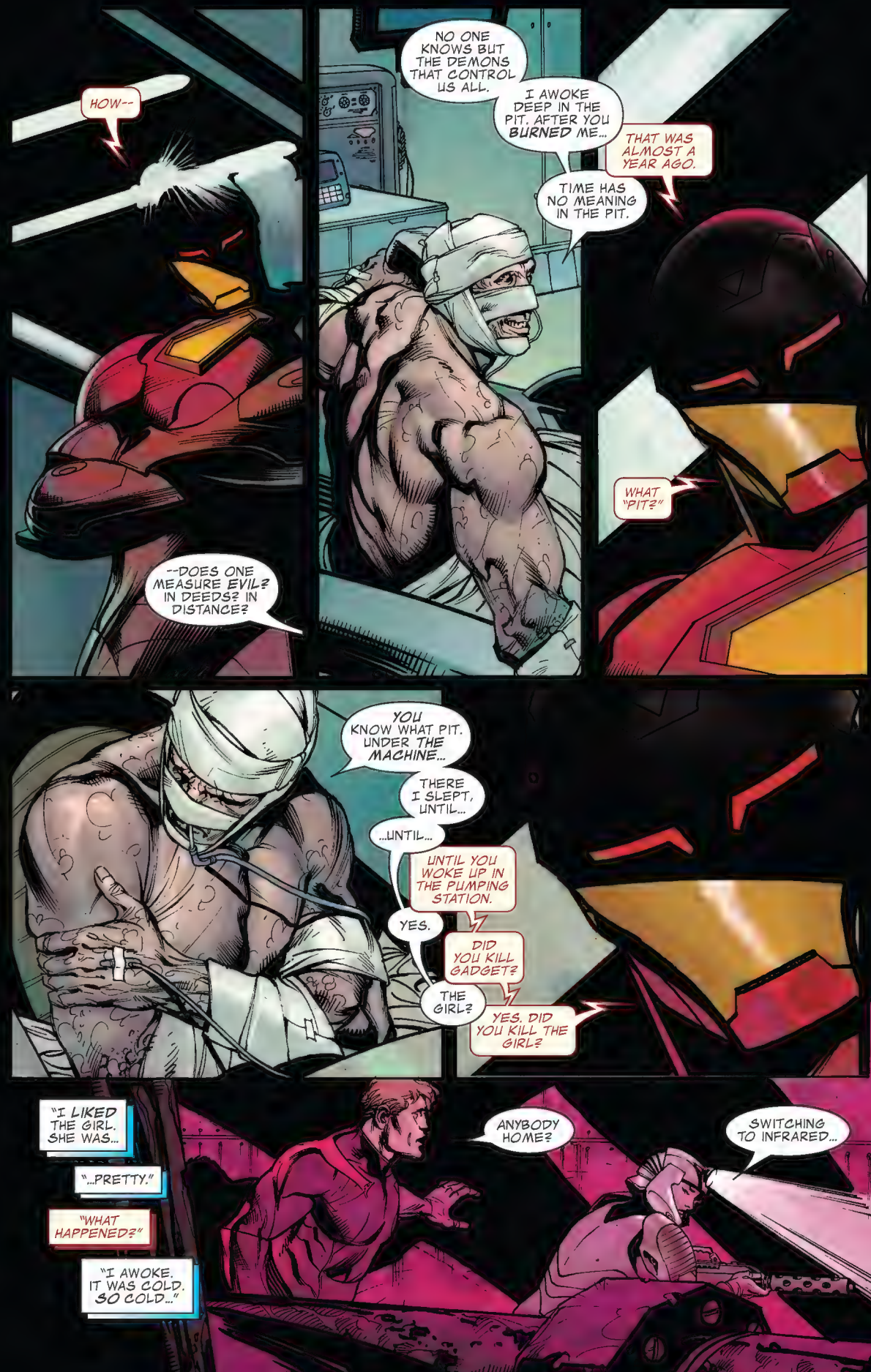

S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER, ABOVE OMAHA, NEBRASKA
I WANT TO TALK TO HIM.
THEN WE HAVE A PROBLEM, SIR...
GRAVITON'S BEEN PLACED IN AN INDUCED COMA.
IF WE REVIVE HIM, WE WON'T BE ABLE TO PUT HIM DOWN AGAIN. HE'D JUST INCREASE THE DENSITY OF HIS TISSUE. IT'LL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO GET A NEEDLE IN HIM.
SO HOW'D THEY PUT HIM DOWN IN THE FIRST PLACE, COMMANDER HILL?
HE WAS UNCONSCIOUS WHEN THEY BROUGHT HIM IN FROM THE BLAST SITE.
HE'S A WITNESS. I NEED TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT.
I'VE GOT A VERY THIN WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY BEFORE THE CSA* FORCES US TO RELEASE GRAVITON INTO FEDERAL CUSTODY. THEN WE HAVE NOTHING.
*CSA: THE COMMISSION ON SUPERHUMAN ACTIVITIES--TOM.
IF WE REVIVE HIM, WE'LL HAVE TO DEPEND SOLELY ON THE DAMPENING ARRAY AROUND THE CELL.
TECH HASN'T CONDUCTED REAL-WORLD TESTING ON ANY METAHUMAN, LET ALONE ONE THAT'S A CLASS-A.
WAKE HIM UP, COMMANDER HILL.
THAT'S AN ORDER.

INITIATIVE FIELD OFFICE, OMAHA
WHAT THE HELL DO YOU PEOPLE THINK YOU'RE DOIN?!
CONFISCATING ALL FILES--DIGITAL AND HARD COPIES. SIGN HERE.
WHAT'S THAT?
A RECEIPT.
I'M NOT SIGNING NOTHIN' UNTIL YOU EXPLAIN THE WHAT-FOR, DUGAN.
S.H.I.E.L.D. IS CONDUCTING A FULL-SCALE INVESTIGATION INTO GADGET'S HOMICIDE. PENDING ITS CONCLUSION, ALL NEBRASKA INITIATIVE OPERATIONS ARE SUSPENDED.
AND JUST WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO UNTIL THEY'RE UN-SUSPENDED?
I DUNNO, CAPTAIN ULTRA. DO YOU PLAY GOLF?
IS THAT SOME KINDA JOKE?
NO, SIR. IT'S A SUGGESTION. YOU'VE BEEN PLACED ON LEAVE UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.
BY WHOSE AUTHORITY?
MINE.


I'VE GOT ONE AGENT DEAD, ANOTHER IN I.C.U. MY JOB AND REPUTATION ARE ON THE LINE, AND YOU WALTZ IN HERE AND TURN THIS SITUATION INTO A CIRCUS?!
I NEED TO COLLECT AS MUCH INFORMATION AS I CAN ABOUT THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO GADGET'S MURDER.
AND YOU COULDN'T DO THAT WITHOUT SHUTTING DOWN MY OPERATION?
NO.
BE PATIENT, GRIFF. I NEED TO HANDLE THIS--
--BECAUSE I CAN'T, RIGHT?
I DIDN'T SAY THAT.
THIS IS MY TEAM. MY TURF...
I TRAINED THOSE KIDS. WORKED WITH THE COMMUNITY. I GOT CONTACTS... EXPERIENCE...
DOESN'T THAT COUNT ANYMORE?
TELL ME ABOUT GADGET. WHAT DID SHE DO WITH HER DOWNTIME?

DOWN-TIME? THAT'S PRETTY MUCH ALL WE HAD...
SHE LIKED TO WORK COLD CASES FOR THE LOCAL P.D.
SINCE SHE HAD INITIATIVE CLEARANCE, THEY'D LET HER POKE AROUND THE STALE FILES.
SHE'D DO SOME PROFILING HERE, NUMBER CRUNCHING THERE. REAL STATISTICIAN, THAT GADGET IS--
--WAS.
SHE WAS A WHIZ--REAL GOOD WITH NUMBERS.
SHE'D STUDY MAPS AND CRIME-STATS, AND IT WOULD ALL JUST...COME TOGETHER. SHE CLEARED THREE OR FOUR COLD CASES A MONTH.
SHE WAS A GOOD KID...
WHAT WAS SHE WORKING ON BEFORE SHE WAS KILLED?
SOME KINDA MISSING PERSONS DEAL.
SHE GOT IT IN HER HEAD THAT THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE MISSING IN NEBRASKA WAS WAY TOO HIGH. TOO MANY PEOPLE FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS...
SHE SHOWED ME SOME CHARTS ONE TIME, NUMBERS AND STUFF. ALL GOBBLEDY-GOOK TO ME--

DUGAN.
YESSIR?
SCAN THE HARD DRIVES FOR ANYTHING ABOUT MISSING PERSONS.
YESSIR. OH, AND HILL JUST CALLED UP FROM THE BRIG...
"...GRAVITON'S AWAKE."
WHAT DO YOU WANT... CREATURE?
ANSWERS.
HOW DID YOU ESCAPE THE PRISON TRANSPORT?
ESCAPE? OH, NO...I DIDN'T ESCAPE.
I WAS...
...TAKEN.

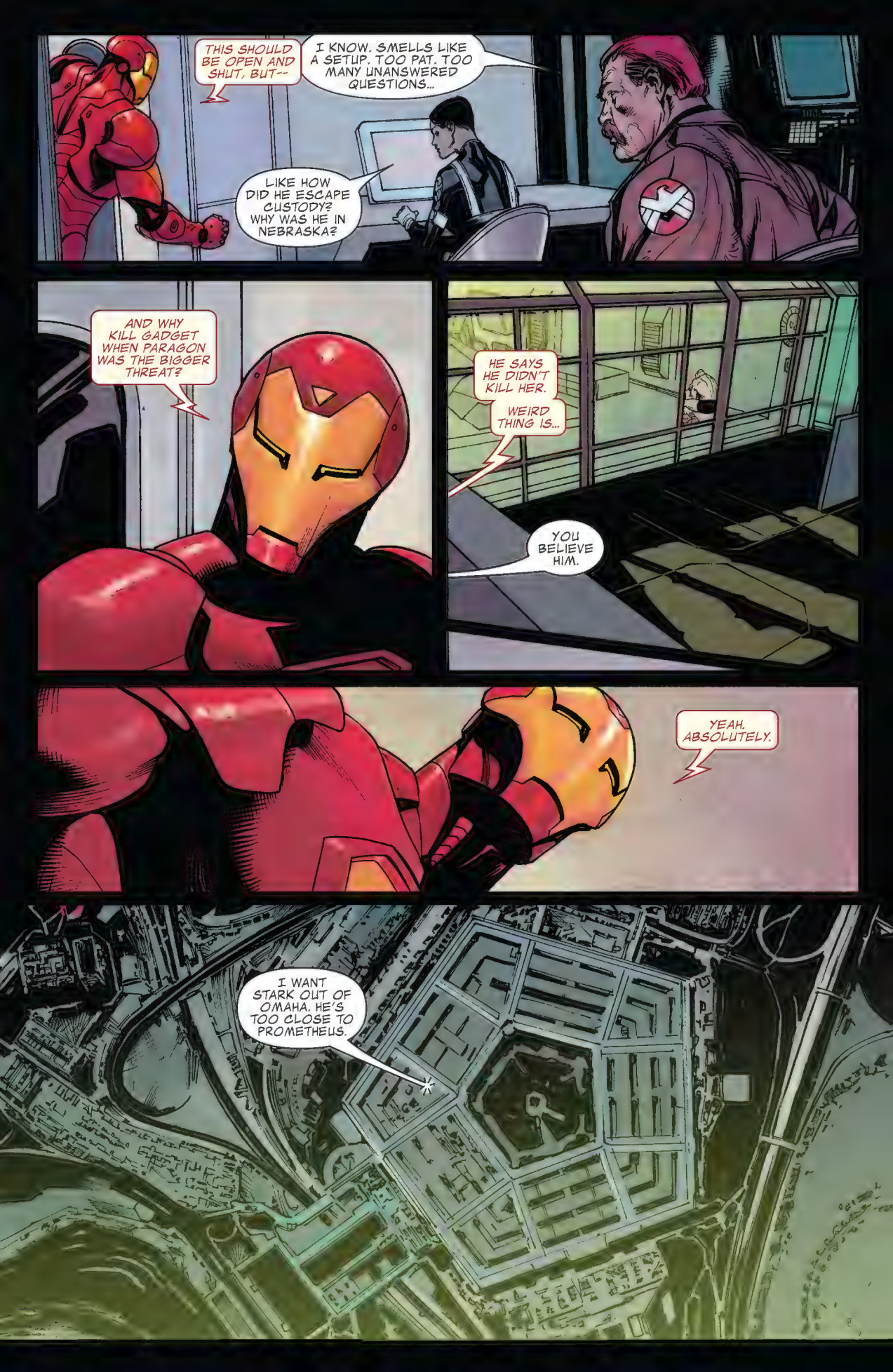

HOW--
--DOES ONE MEASURE EVIL? IN DEEDS? IN DISTANCE?
NO ONE KNOWS BUT THE DEMONS THAT CONTROL US ALL.
I AWOKE DEEP IN THE PIT. AFTER YOU BURNED ME...
TIME HAS NO MEANING IN THE PIT.
THAT WAS ALMOST A YEAR AGO.
WHAT "PIT?"
YOU KNOW WHAT PIT. UNDER THE MACHINE...
THERE I SLEPT, UNTIL...
...UNTIL...
UNTIL YOU WOKE UP IN THE PUMPING STATION.
YES.
DID YOU KILL GADGET?
THE GIRL?
YES. DID YOU KILL THE GIRL?
"I LIKED THE GIRL. SHE WAS...
"...PRETTY."
"WHAT HAPPENED?"
"I AWOKE. IT WAS COLD. SO COLD..."
ANYBODY HOME?
SWITCHING TO INFRARED...

BOGIE. THREE O'CLOCK. IN THE CORNER...
YOU. BEHIND THE MACHINE. STEP OUT SLOWLY WITH YOUR HANDS UP...
BEHIND THE MACHINE...?
I AM NOT THE ONE BEHIND THE MACHINE...
THE MACHINE IS... BEHIND YOU, CHILD.
GRAVITON!

MY GODDDD...
NNNNOOOO...!
NO! DON'T! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
KRRRAK!
NO!!!
SHE WAS KILLED BY MY POWER...
...BUT NOT BY MY HAND.
CUT THE CRAZY ACT, HAL!
AGAIN. ANSWER ME STRAIGHT... IN ENGLISH.
DID...YOU... KILL...HER?
I...I UNDERSTAND NOW...
YOU SEE THEM, TOO!

WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
YOU KNOW...
THE DEAD...
THE ONES YOU FAILED...
YOU TRY TO HIDE BEHIND YOUR MASK, BUT I CAN TELL. I SEE THEM, TOO. THEY SPEAK TO ME AS WELL.

YOU'RE INSANE!
YOU MUST LISTEN TO THEM.
HER BLOOD IS ON THE HANDS OF ANY MAN WHO CAN SEE AND HEAR, AND YET DOES NOTHING...
WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?
GUY'S READY FOR THE BAT-FACTORY.
HAVE YOU NOTICED...
WHAT?
DIRECTOR STARK. HE'S... WEARING THE ARMOR ALMOST ALL THE TIME, NOW.
WHAT'S YOUR POINT, COMMANDER?
I'M NOT SURE. I JUST THINK IT'S--
THAT WAS ALMOST A TOTAL WASTE OF TIME.


THIS SHOULD BE OPEN AND SHUT, BUT--
I KNOW. SMELLS LIKE A SETUP. TOO PAT. TOO MANY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS...
LIKE HOW DID HE ESCAPE CUSTODY? WHY WAS HE IN NEBRASKA?
AND WHY KILL GADGET WHEN PARAGON WAS THE BIGGER THREAT?
HE SAYS HE DIDN'T KILL HER.
WEIRD THING IS...
YOU BELIEVE HIM.
YEAH. ABSOLUTELY.
I WANT STARK OUT OF OMAHA. HE'S TOO CLOSE TO PROMETHEUS.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE JACK KOONING'S OFFICE, WASHINGTON, D.C.
HIS CONTINUED PRESENCE IS A PROFOUND DISTRACTION TO DOCTOR HANSEN.
SORRY, TEM, BUT IT'S OUTSIDE MY BAILIWICK.
PERHAPS IT'S JUST ME, JACK, BUT YOU SEEM TO BE SENDING A MIXED MESSAGE.
HOW SO?
OUR MANDATE WAS CLEAR. CAPTAIN AMERICA'S DEATH HAS LEFT AN IMMENSE, SUCKING HOLE IN OUR NATION'S DEFENSE...
WE WERE TO FAST-TRACK EXTREMIS DEVELOPMENT IN ORDER TO FILL THAT VACUUM, TO PROVIDE A NEW CHAMPION TO DEFEND AMERICA'S INTERESTS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
THAT'S CORRECT.
HAS THAT MANDATE CHANGED IN ANY SIGNIFICANT WAY?
NOT THAT I'M AWARE OF.
PERHAPS, THEN, YOU'RE NOT AWARE THAT WE HAVE PROGRESSED WELL AHEAD OF OUR ORIGINAL PROJECTIONS. AS A MATTER OF FACT...
...WE'VE NEARLY COMPLETED PHASE THREE OF OUR PRE-CLINICAL TRIALS.
PHASE THREE? WHY WASN'T I INFORMED?

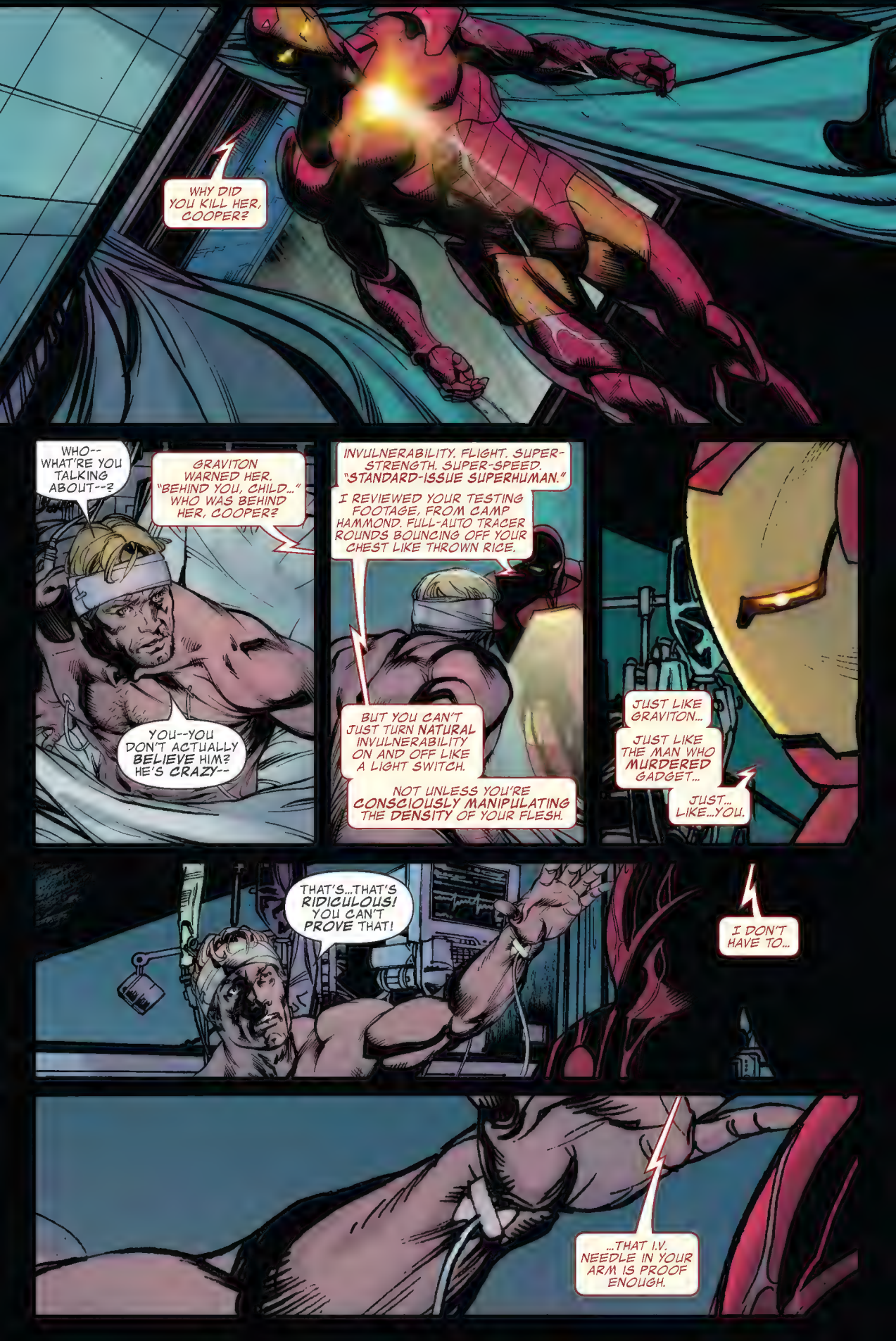
I THOUGHT YOU'D BE PLEASED.
IN FACT, WE ARE COMPILING ALL OF OUR FINDINGS ON THE SUBJECTS INTO A COMPREHENSIVE REPORT.
I WAS HOPING WE'D BE ABLE TO DELIVER IT TO YOU BY THE END OF THE WEEK.
BUT, WHAT WITH THIS STARK ISSUE...
WAIT. SUBJECTS? *HUMAN* SUBJECTS?
OF COURSE.
GIVEN THE URGENCY OF OUR MANDATE-- AN URGENCY YOU ***JUST CONFIRMED*** MOMENTS AGO--I ASSUMED YOU WOULDN'T OBJECT TO MY, WELL...
...SOMEWHAT ***AGGRESSIVE*** INTERPRETATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OUTLINED IN THE BELMONT REPORT--
THIS ISN'T ***TUSKEGEE,*** DAMN IT!
DO YOU HAVE ANY ***IDEA*** WHAT THE FALLOUT WOULD BE IF IT BECAME ***PUBLIC*** THAT WE'RE TESTING EXTREMIS ON HUMAN SUBJECTS?
IT'D MAKE ***MK-ULTRA*** LOOK LIKE A ***FRATERNITY PRANK!***
MY POINT EXACTLY.
WE ARE SO CLOSE. ONE PHASE AWAY FROM PROJECT COMPLETION. WE COULD FIELD A NEW CAPTAIN AMERICA BY THE END OF THE YEAR...
EXPOSURE AT THIS POINT, HOWEVER, WOULD BE DETRIMENTAL. NOT ONLY TO YOU AND TO ME PERSONALLY, BUT TO OUR NATION'S SECURITY AS WELL.
WHICH BRINGS US BACK TO STARK'S CONTINUED PRESENCE IN OMAHA...
YOU REALLY SHOULD TRY THIS BRANDY, BY THE WAY. HENNESSY ELLIPSE. THIRTY-EIGHT HUNDRED A BOTTLE. IT'S...
...TRANSFORMATIVE.

DOES HANSEN KNOW?
ABOUT TESTING HUMAN SUBJECTS? OF COURSE NOT. I FELT, GIVEN HER FORMER ALLEGIANCE TO MR. STARK, IT WOULD BE BEST TO KEEP HER OUT OF THE LOOP.
I SEE. YES. OF COURSE.
AND STARK...?
HE WON'T BE A PROBLEM. I'LL SEE TO IT PERSONALLY.
DIRECTOR STARK, WE FINISHED SCANNING THOSE DISKS FROM THE OMAHA FIELD OFFICE.
FIND ANYTHING ON GADGET'S MISSING PERSONS INVESTIGATION?
NEGATIVE. WE COULD CHECK THE COMPUTER AT HER RESIDENCE. I'LL SEND A TEAM--
DON'T BOTHER...

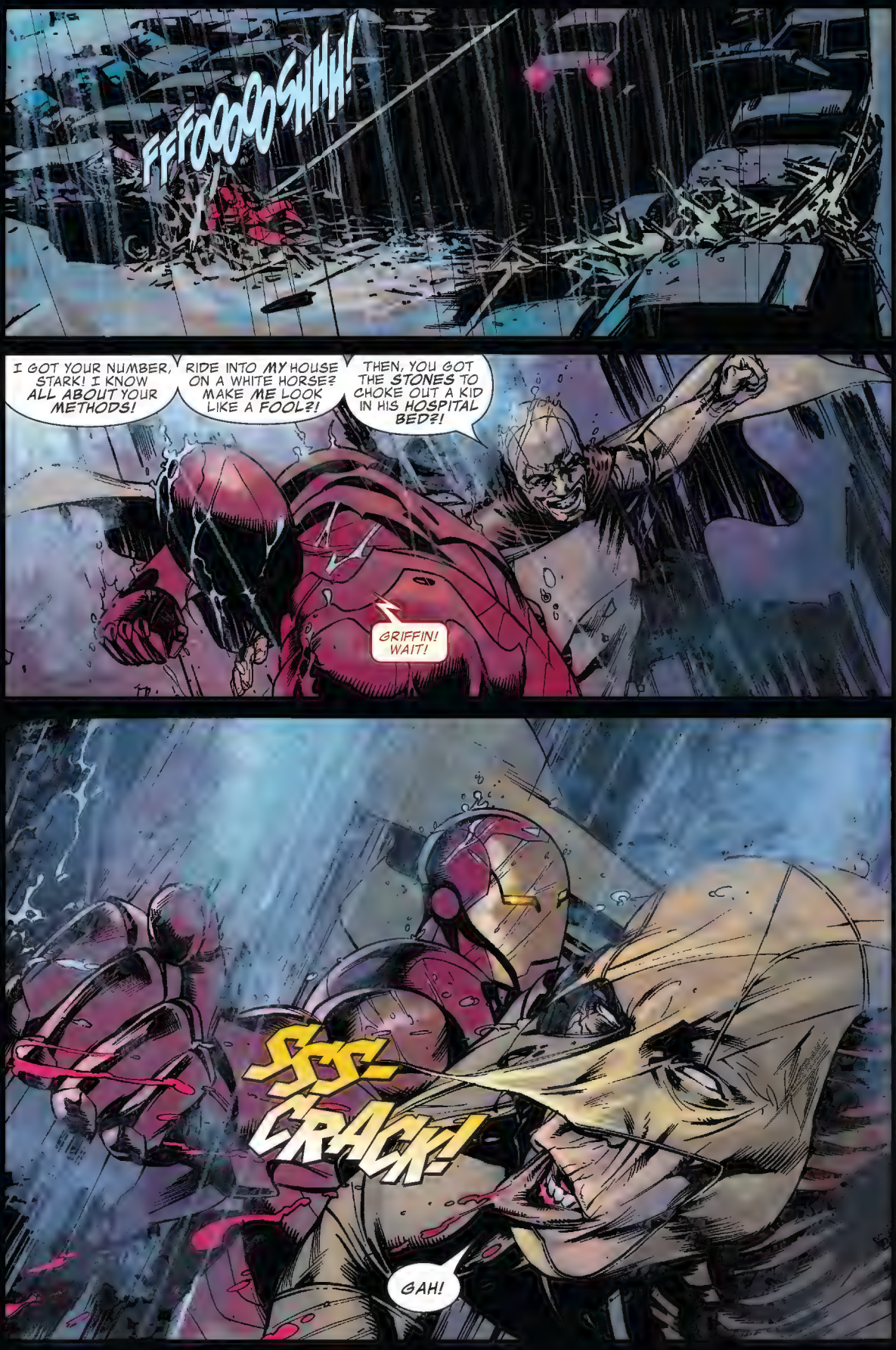
"...I'LL HANDLE IT."
CHIN'S
SENDING A TEAM WOULD BE LIKE DESECRATING A GRAVE...
STRANGERS RIFLING THROUGH HER DRAWERS, PAWING THROUGH HER CLOTHING. COLDLY EXAMINING PHOTOS OF FRIENDS, FAMILY, VACATIONS, SCHEMATICS FOR ARMOR UPGRADES...
...JOURNAL ENTRIES, LOVE LETTERS.
BROKEN PIECES OF A LIFE CUT SHORT. MORE THAN I NEED TO KNOW. MORE THAN I WANT TO KNOW...
SCANNING HARD DRIVE
...BUT NOTHING ABOUT AN INVESTIGATION INTO MISSING-PERSONS.
IF I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR, I'D NEVER GUESS ANYTHING WAS MISSING. WHOEVER CLEANED THIS PLACE UP WAS A PRO--
VITAMINS
BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...
OHGOD...
...BEEEEEEEEEEEE.....

DEAR GOD, NO... PLEASE...NOT HAPPY HOGAN. THIS ISN'T REAL. IT CAN'T...BE...REAL...
OF COURSE... IT ISN'T... TONY.
ONE... TWO...THREE... FOUR...
COUNTING... WON'T HELP... BUDDY.
PLEASE... LISTEN TO ME...
REMEMBER... WHAT GRAVITON SAID?

"THE MACHINE...IS BEHIND YOU... CHILD."
...BEHIND YOU...
...BEHIND YOU...
...BEHIND YOU...
BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!
WHA...?


WHY DID YOU KILL HER, COOPER?
WHO-- WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT--?
GRAVITON WARNED HER. "BEHIND YOU, CHILD..." WHO WAS BEHIND HER, COOPER?
YOU--YOU DON'T ACTUALLY BELIEVE HIM? HE'S CRAZY--
INVULNERABILITY. FLIGHT. SUPER-STRENGTH. SUPER-SPEED. "STANDARD-ISSUE SUPERHUMAN."
I REVIEWED YOUR TESTING FOOTAGE, FROM CAMP HAMMOND. FULL-AUTO TRACER ROUNDS BOUNCING OFF YOUR CHEST LIKE THROWN RICE.
BUT YOU CAN'T JUST TURN NATURAL INVULNERABILITY ON AND OFF LIKE A LIGHT SWITCH.
NOT UNLESS YOU'RE CONSCIOUSLY MANIPULATING THE DENSITY OF YOUR FLESH.
JUST LIKE GRAVITON...
JUST LIKE THE MAN WHO MURDERED GADGET...
JUST... LIKE...YOU.
THAT'S...THAT'S RIDICULOUS! YOU CAN'T PROVE THAT!
I DON'T HAVE TO...
...THAT I.V. NEEDLE IN YOUR ARM IS PROOF ENOUGH.

WARNING! GRAVITATIONAL ANOMALY! SOURCE: ROTH, COOPER (PARAGON)
YOU'RE DOING IT RIGHT NOW, AREN'T YOU?
REROUTING REPULSOR INPUT TO REINFORCE ARMOR-MASS.
DANGER AVERTED... HAVE A NICE DAY, MR. STARK.
ONE PROBLEM, KID...
I'M NOT GADGET!
FFFF-
BOOM!


FFOOOOSHHH!
I GOT YOUR NUMBER, STARK! I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOUR METHODS!
RIDE INTO MY HOUSE ON A WHITE HORSE? MAKE ME LOOK LIKE A FOOL?!
THEN, YOU GOT THE STONES TO CHOKE OUT A KID IN HIS HOSPITAL BED?!
GRIFFIN! WAIT!
SSS-CRACK!
GAH!

NO! WON'T LET...YOU PIN IT ON...
...PIN IT ON THE KID...
...UHHNNN...

PROMETHEUS CORPORATION, NEBRASKA
MOM...? MOM, PLEASE...
WAKE UP...
PLEASE...
I'M SO TERRIBLY SORRY, COOPER...
Roth, Gretchen
...WE DID EVERYTHING WE COULD TO SAVE HER.
TO BE CONTINUED...

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IRON MAN
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WHEN BILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK DONS SOPHISTICATED STEEL-MESH ARMOR OF HIS OWN DESIGN, HE BECOMES A LIVING HIGH-TECH WEAPON--THE WORLD'S GREATEST HUMAN FIGHTING MACHINE.

THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

PREVIOUSLY...

As head of the global peacekeeping force S.H.I.E.L.D., Tony Stark has established the Initiative, which places trained super heroes in locations throughout the U.S. But Initiative operations have been suspended in Omaha when one such hero was killed, and another hospitalized, apparently due to a confrontation with the mentally-unstable Graviton. Graviton claims he was manipulated and did not kill the young hero Gadget, but his explanations make little sense.

While Stark continues to seek answers about Gadget's death, the Mandarin – passing himself off as scientist-industrialist Tem Borjigin – tries to keep him away from the investigation. "Borjigin" is working under government contract to investigate the Extremis virus, aided by former S.H.I.E.L.D. scientist Maya Hansen. This arrangement is unknown to Stark, who was told that Maya committed suicide.

Amidst his investigation, Stark's most promising leads are coming not from research but from ghosts: apparent visitations from those he has recently lost. Prompted by one such vision, he determines that Gadget's killer was her own teammate Cooper Roth, A.K.A. Paragon. Roth, it seems, did not act alone, but under the influence of the Mandarin himself.

HAUNTED

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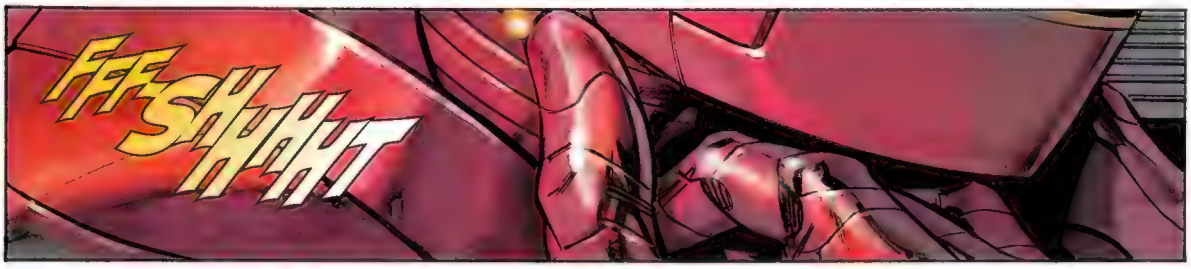
PROMETHEUS CORPORATION, NEBRASKA
YOU LIED TO ME!
WHA-WHOMP!
MY MOTHER WAS ALL I HAD...
YOU PROMISED...
...IF I DID EVERYTHING YOU TOLD ME TO DO, YOU'D MAKE HER BETTER.

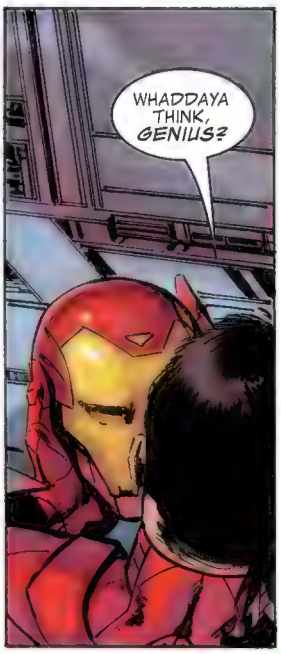
ENOUGH!
FF-BOOM!
K-RRACK!
EYAHHHHH!

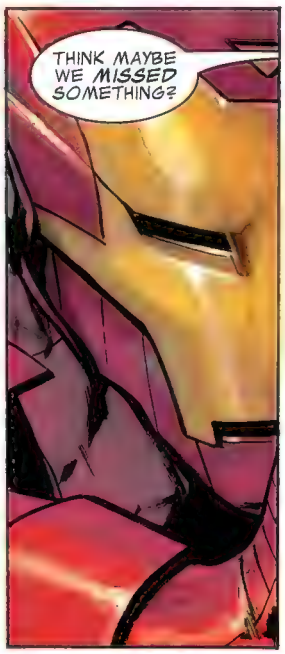
WHY SHOULDN'T I KILL YOU, PARAGON?
I...DID... EVERYTHING... YOU TOLD ME...
AND, STILL, YOUR MOTHER DIED. I KNOW. BUT I AM NOT HER KILLER.
THEN... WHO...?
YOU SAW IT YOURSELF. JUST MOMENTS AGO.
YOU SAW HIM THROTTLE THE LIFE OUT OF HER. HE WAS LAUGHING...
SAW IT MYSELF...
LAUGHING...
WHO KILLED YOUR MOTHER?
GRA- GRAVITON... KILLED...MY MOTHER.
YES, MY SON. I'M SORRY...
SO SORRY...

S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER, ABOVE OMAHA, NEBRASKA
ACCESS NCIC...CALCULATE MEAN AVERAGE MISSING PERSONS PER ANNUM... NEBRASKA...1996 TO 2006?
WORKING...
... 329 MISSING PERSONS PER ANNUM.
ACCESS...TOTAL MISSING PERSONS... STATE OF NEBRASKA... LAST 12 MONTHS?
WORKING...

... 864 MISSING PERSONS.


FFSHHHT


WHADDAYA THINK, GENIUS?

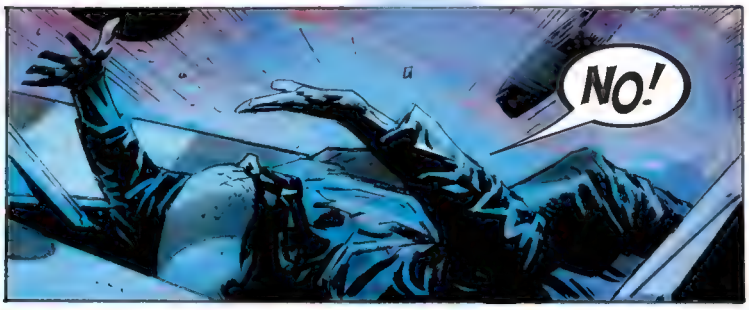

THINK MAYBE WE MISSED SOMETHING?

RAH!
SECURITY SUITE, SUB-DIRECTOR MARIA HILL.
EVERY DAY IT GETS WORSE.
WHOOMPH!
HE'S COMING APART AT THE SEAMS--
3
RED ALERT! WOOP-WOOP-WOOP...
WOOP-WOOP-WOOP-WOOP-WOOP-WOOP...
SEAL OFF GRAVITON'S CELL AND GET THE POWER BACK ONLINE!
YESSIR!
SKREEE-
BOOOM!

GET ALPHA TEAM DOWN HERE, STAT!
BLAM BLAM BLAM
ROUNDS ARE INEFFECTIVE! ROUNDS ARE-- AHH!
WHAP
UNGH!
MURDERER!
CHOOM!

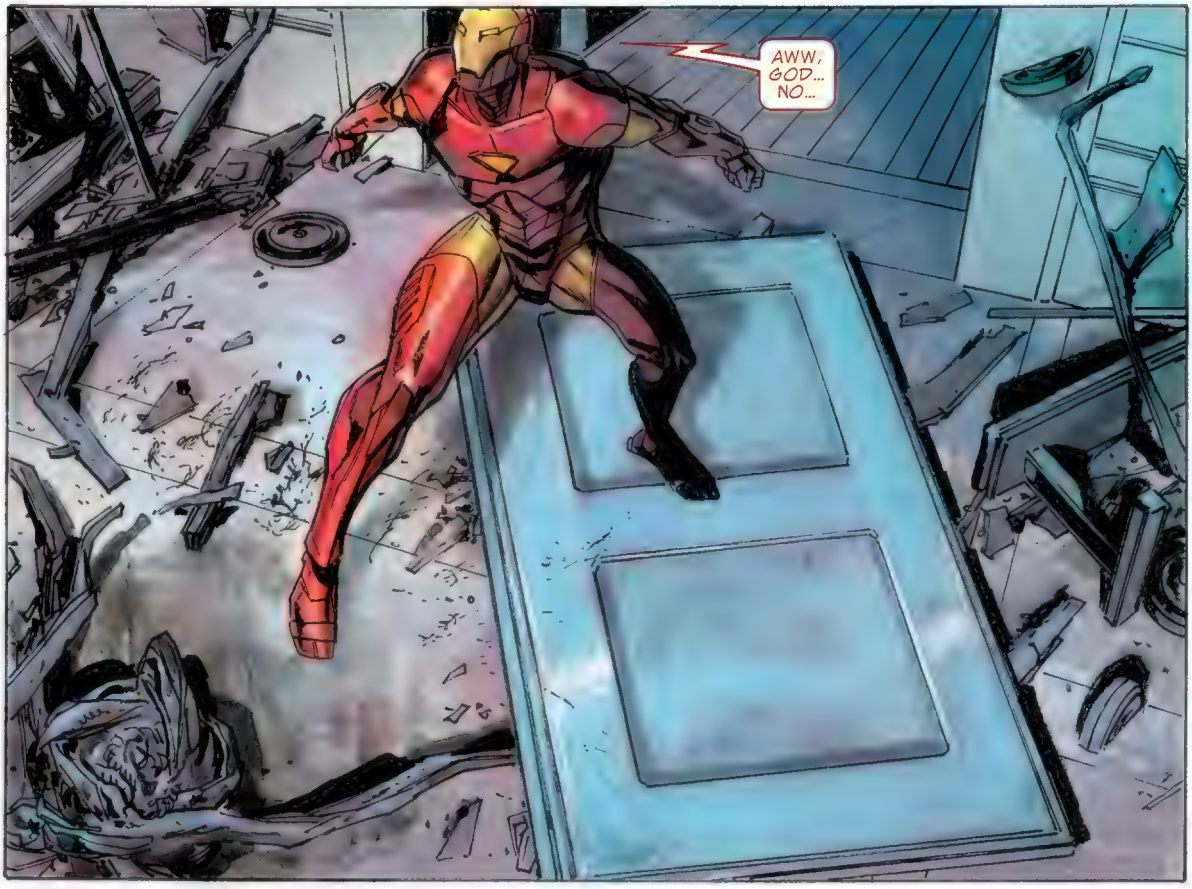
RRRRRRRR...

RRRRRR!!!

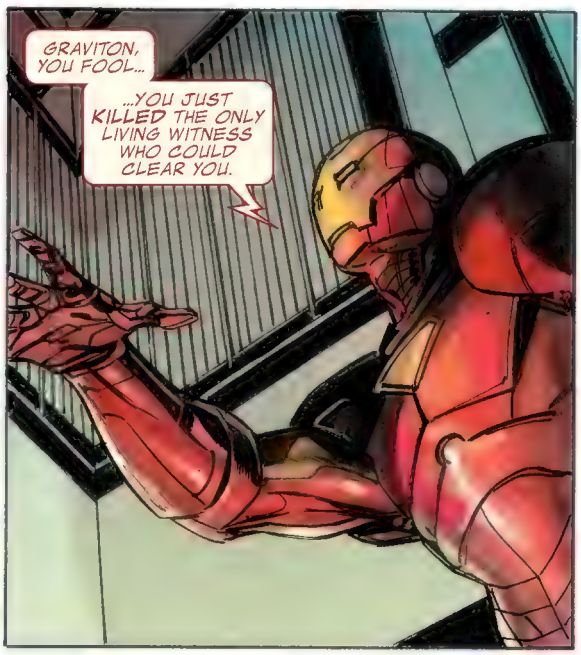

NO!

YOU CALL ME A MURDERER, PARAGON?!
HHRRUHH!
GAAHH!
POOR BROKEN BOY. THE MACHINE HAS NO MORE USE FOR YOU. YOU HAVE BECOME...
...REDUNDANT.
AND YOU WILL DIE IN THE SAME WAY AS THE ONE YOU KILLED!
NO! GAA...
ERR RAHHHH!

NO!
SO WHAP!


AWW, GOD... NO...

ARE YOU NOT PLEASED?


GRAVITON, YOU FOOL...
...YOU JUST KILLED THE ONLY LIVING WITNESS WHO COULD CLEAR YOU.

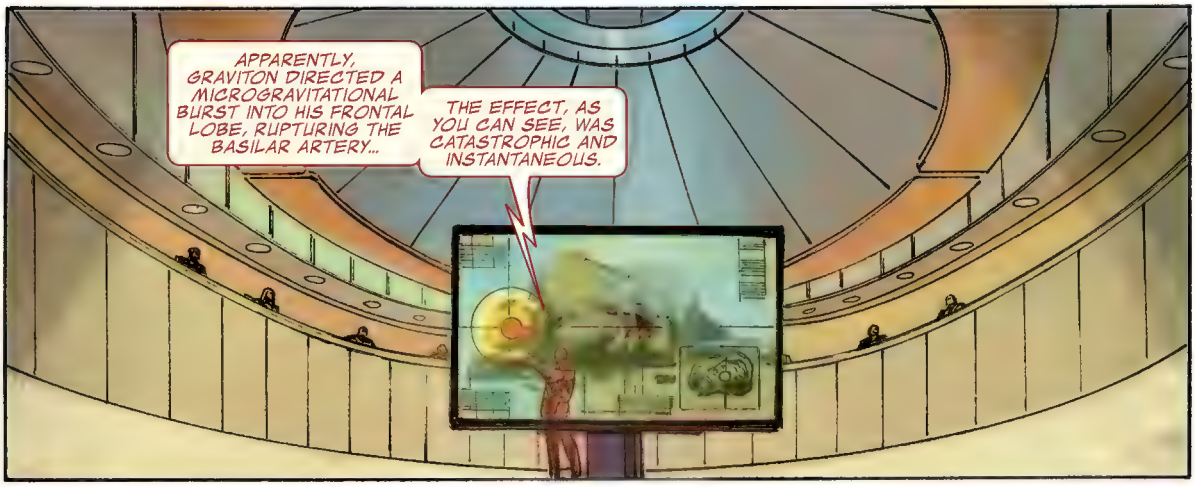
DID YOU REALLY THINK I WOULD BE PERMITTED TO LIVE AND STAND TRIAL?
IF SO, THEN IT IS YOU WHO IS THE FOOL, STARK.

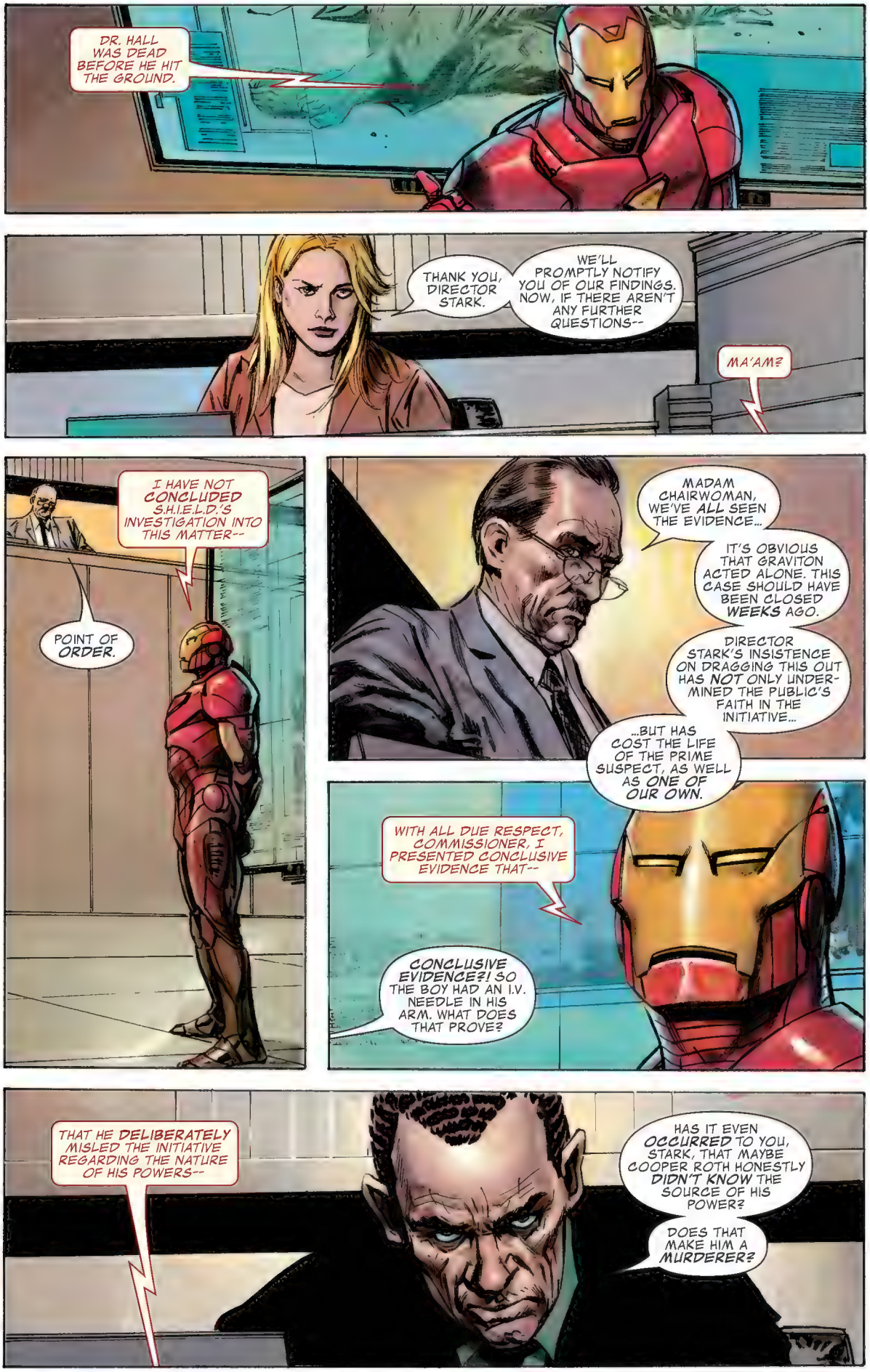
THE THINGS I'VE SEEN...
THE THINGS THEY'VE DONE TO ME...
I WAS HUMAN ONCE...
I'M TIRED...
...SO VERY TIRED.

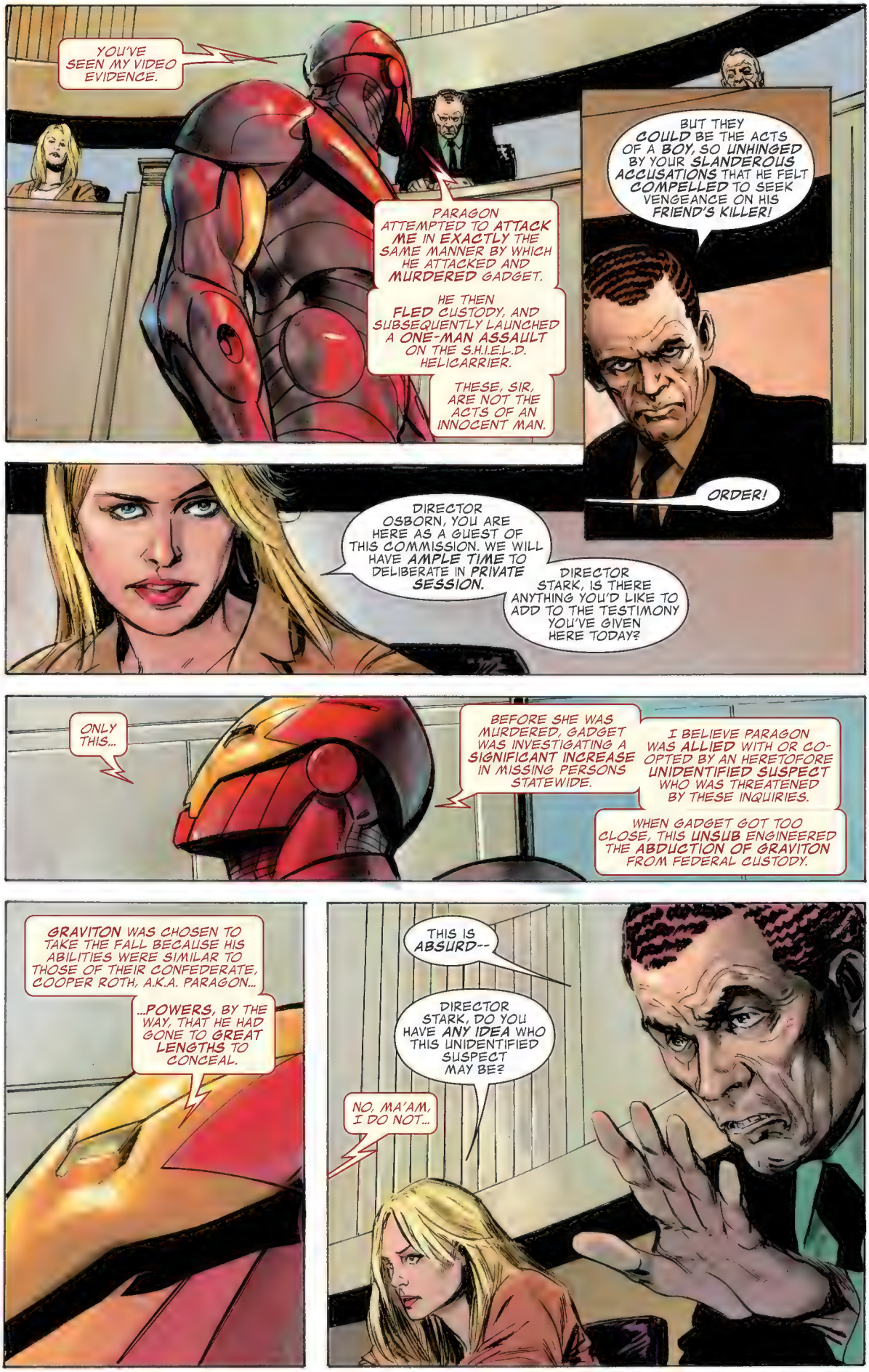
NO, HALL! DON'T!

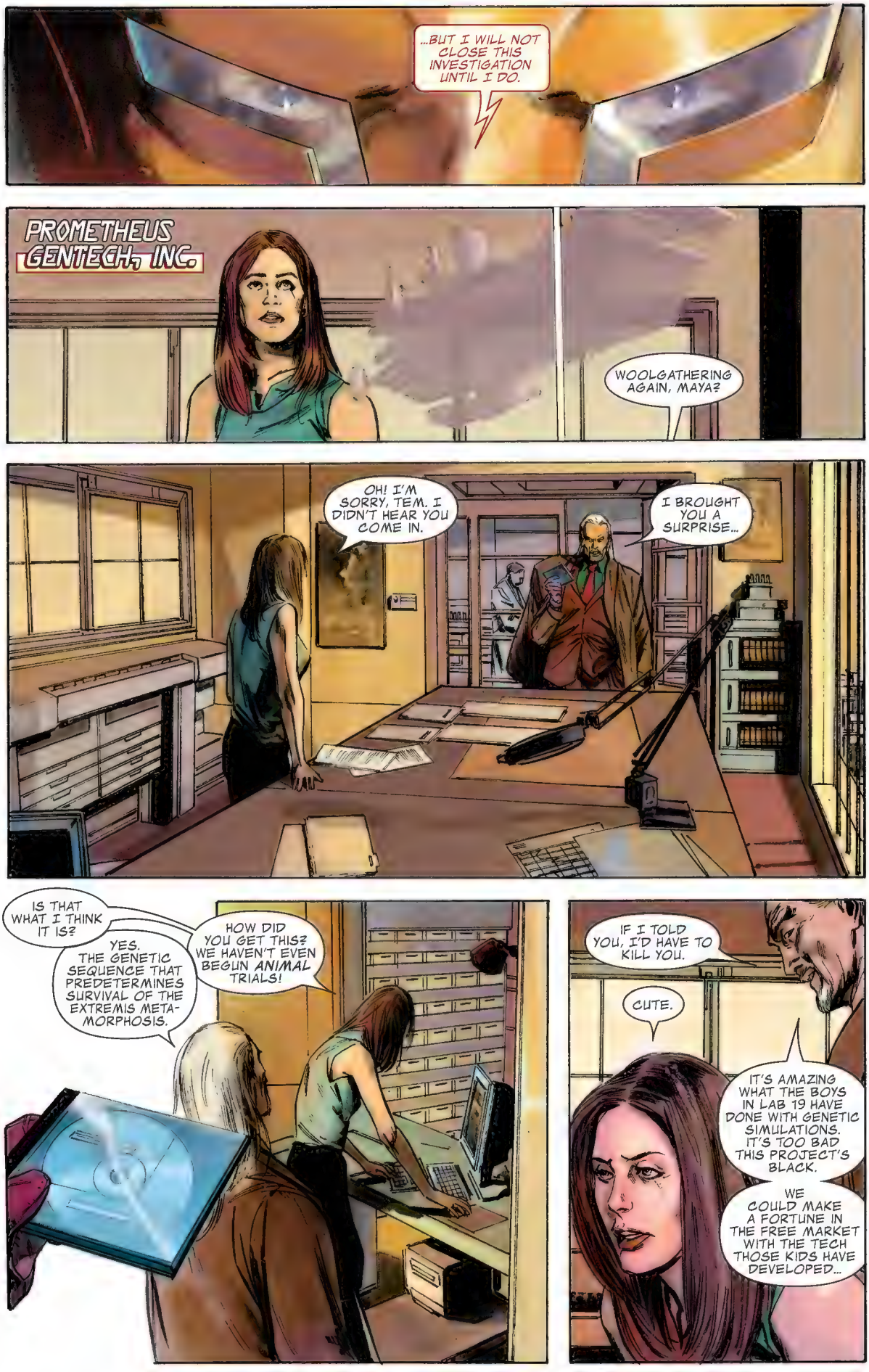
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE...?

COMMISSION ON SUPERHUMAN ACTIVITIES HOME OFFICE, WASHINGTON, D.C.
SUBARACHNOID CEREBRAL HEMORRHAGE. SELF-INFLICTED...

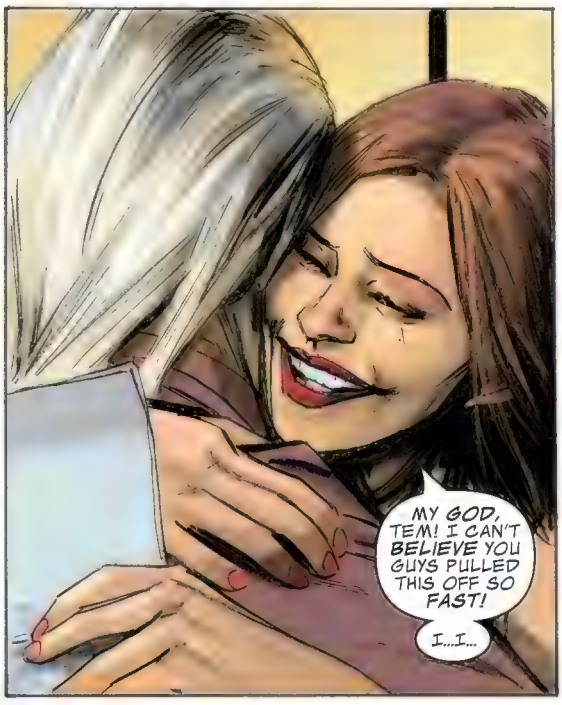

APPARENTLY, GRAVITON DIRECTED A MICROGRAVITATIONAL BURST INTO HIS FRONTAL LOBE, RUPTURING THE BASILAR ARTERY...
THE EFFECT, AS YOU CAN SEE, WAS CATASTROPHIC AND INSTANTANEOUS.


DR. HALL WAS DEAD BEFORE HE HIT THE GROUND.
THANK YOU, DIRECTOR STARK.
WE'LL PROMPTLY NOTIFY YOU OF OUR FINDINGS. NOW, IF THERE AREN'T ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS--
MA'AM?
I HAVE NOT CONCLUDED S.H.I.E.L.D.'S INVESTIGATION INTO THIS MATTER--
POINT OF ORDER.
MADAM CHAIRWOMAN, WE'VE ALL SEEN THE EVIDENCE...
IT'S OBVIOUS THAT GRAVITON ACTED ALONE. THIS CASE SHOULD HAVE BEEN CLOSED WEEKS AGO.
DIRECTOR STARK'S INSISTENCE ON DRAGGING THIS OUT HAS NOT ONLY UNDERMINED THE PUBLIC'S FAITH IN THE INITIATIVE...
...BUT HAS COST THE LIFE OF THE PRIME SUSPECT, AS WELL AS ONE OF OUR OWN.
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, COMMISSIONER, I PRESENTED CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE THAT--
CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE?! SO THE BOY HAD AN I.V. NEEDLE IN HIS ARM. WHAT DOES THAT PROVE?
THAT HE DELIBERATELY MISLED THE INITIATIVE REGARDING THE NATURE OF HIS POWERS--
HAS IT EVEN OCCURRED TO YOU, STARK, THAT MAYBE COOPER ROTH HONESTLY DIDN'T KNOW THE SOURCE OF HIS POWER?
DOES THAT MAKE HIM A MURDERER?


YOU'VE SEEN MY VIDEO EVIDENCE.
PARAGON ATTEMPTED TO ATTACK ME IN EXACTLY THE SAME MANNER BY WHICH HE ATTACKED AND MURDERED GADGET.
HE THEN FLED CUSTODY, AND SUBSEQUENTLY LAUNCHED A ONE-MAN ASSAULT ON THE S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER.
THESE, SIR, ARE NOT THE ACTS OF AN INNOCENT MAN.
BUT THEY COULD BE THE ACTS OF A BOY, SO UNHINGED BY YOUR SLANDEROUS ACCUSATIONS THAT HE FELT COMPELLED TO SEEK VENGEANCE ON HIS FRIEND'S KILLER!
ORDER!
DIRECTOR OSBORN, YOU ARE HERE AS A GUEST OF THIS COMMISSION. WE WILL HAVE AMPLE TIME TO DELIBERATE IN PRIVATE SESSION.
DIRECTOR STARK, IS THERE ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE TO ADD TO THE TESTIMONY YOU'VE GIVEN HERE TODAY?
ONLY THIS...
BEFORE SHE WAS MURDERED, GADGET WAS INVESTIGATING A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN MISSING PERSONS STATEWIDE.
I BELIEVE PARAGON WAS ALLIED WITH OR CO-OPTED BY AN HERETOFORE UNIDENTIFIED SUSPECT WHO WAS THREATENED BY THESE INQUIRIES.
WHEN GADGET GOT TOO CLOSE, THIS UNSUB ENGINEERED THE ABDUCTION OF GRAVITON FROM FEDERAL CUSTODY.
GRAVITON WAS CHOSEN TO TAKE THE FALL BECAUSE HIS ABILITIES WERE SIMILAR TO THOSE OF THEIR CONFEDERATE, COOPER ROTH, A.K.A. PARAGON...
...POWERS, BY THE WAY, THAT HE HAD GONE TO GREAT LENGTHS TO CONCEAL.
THIS IS ABSURD--
DIRECTOR STARK, DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHO THIS UNIDENTIFIED SUSPECT MAY BE?
NO, MA'AM, I DO NOT...


...BUT I WILL NOT CLOSE THIS INVESTIGATION UNTIL I DO.
PROMETHEUS GENTECH, INC.
WOOLGATHERING AGAIN, MAYA?
OH! I'M SORRY, TEM. I DIDN'T HEAR YOU COME IN.
I BROUGHT YOU A SURPRISE...
IS THAT WHAT I THINK IT IS?
YES. THE GENETIC SEQUENCE THAT PREDETERMINES SURVIVAL OF THE EXTREMIS META-MORPHOSIS.
HOW DID YOU GET THIS? WE HAVEN'T EVEN BEGUN ANIMAL TRIALS!
IF I TOLD YOU, I'D HAVE TO KILL YOU.
CUTE.
IT'S AMAZING WHAT THE BOYS IN LAB 19 HAVE DONE WITH GENETIC SIMULATIONS. IT'S TOO BAD THIS PROJECT'S BLACK.
WE COULD MAKE A FORTUNE IN THE FREE MARKET WITH THE TECH THOSE KIDS HAVE DEVELOPED...

HOW OFTEN DOES IT OCCUR?
FAIRLY RARE. TWO-POINT-FIVE PER HUNDRED INDIVIDUALS. WHICH COINCIDES PERFECTLY WITH YOUR PROJECTIONS OF SURVIVAL RATES.
CAN WE DEVELOP A PREEMPTIVE TEST?
THEY'RE ALREADY WORKING ON IT.

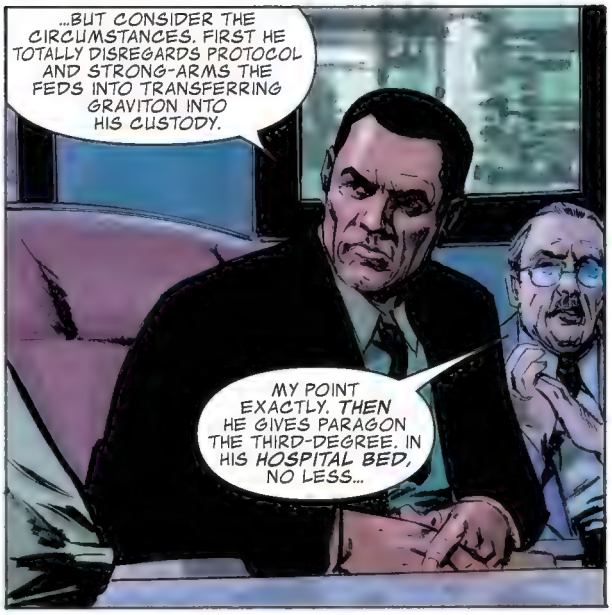

MY GOD, TEM! I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU GUYS PULLED THIS OFF SO FAST!
I...I...

WHAT'S WRONG, CHILD?
I'M NOT PULLING MY WEIGHT, THAT'S ALL. I WISH I WAS ON MY "A" GAME. IT'S JUST, YOU KNOW...
...SO HARD TO CONCENTRATE.

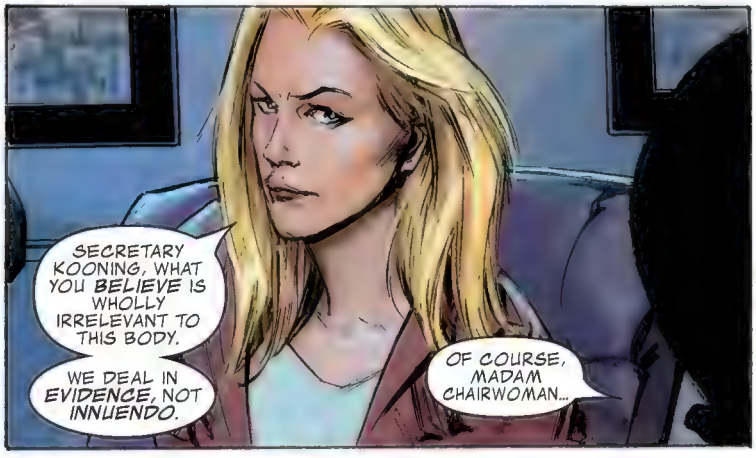
I KNOW, CHILD. I KNOW...

IF IT WAS ANYBODY ELSE, I'D AGREE, JACK. THE EVIDENCE IS THIN. UNDERWHELMING, IN FACT...

BUT THIS ISN'T "ANYBODY ELSE." THIS IS TONY STARK. AND I THINK WE SHOULD GIVE HIM THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT...
I AGREE. STARK'S GUT IS WORTH A MOUNTAIN OF HARD EVIDENCE AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED.
NORMALLY, YES...


...BUT CONSIDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. FIRST HE TOTALLY DISREGARDS PROTOCOL AND STRONG-ARMS THE FEDS INTO TRANSFERRING GRAVITON INTO HIS CUSTODY.
MY POINT EXACTLY. THEN HE GIVES PARAGON THE THIRD-DEGREE. IN HIS HOSPITAL BED, NO LESS...

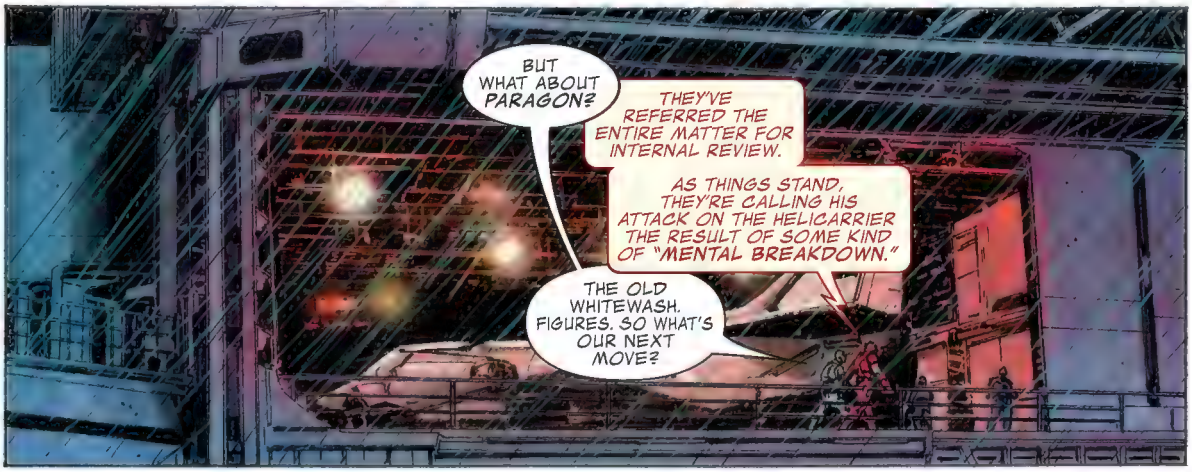
I BELIEVE DIRECTOR STARK MAY BE, WELL...
...UNSTABLE.


SECRETARY KOONING, WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS WHOLLY IRRELEVANT TO THIS BODY.
WE DEAL IN EVIDENCE, NOT INNUENDO.
OF COURSE, MADAM CHAIRWOMAN...

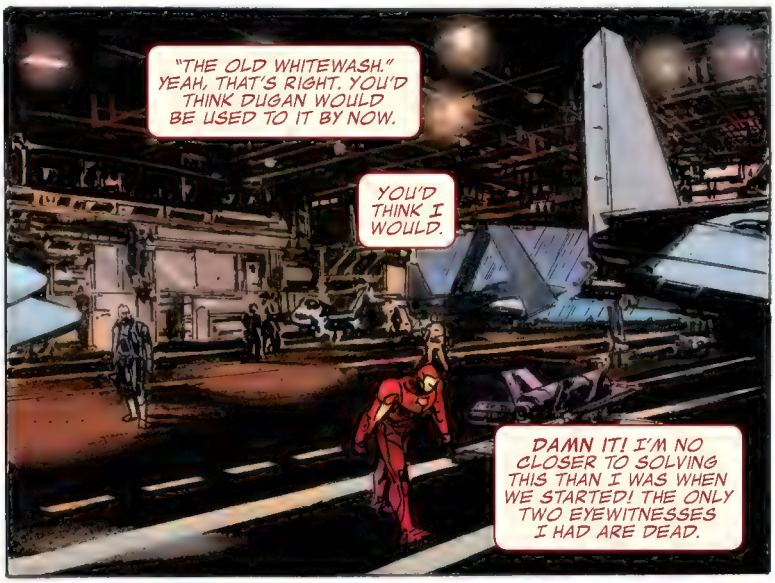
...S.H.I.E.L.D. SUB-DIRECTOR MARIA HILL.

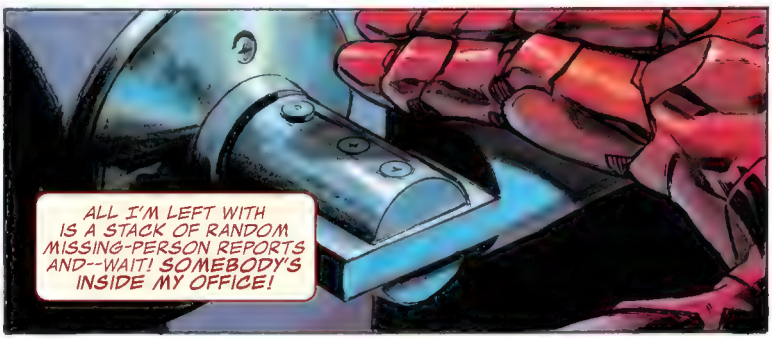
WHICH IS WHY I SUGGESTED TO COMMISSIONER SIKORSKY THAT THE C.S.A DEFER HEARING THE TESTIMONY OF MY WITNESS UNTIL YOU WERE IN CLOSED SESSION.
WITNESS?
YES. I'D LIKE TO CALL FORWARD...

I SAY TELL 'EM TO SHOVE THEIR ORDERS--
FORGET IT, DUGAN. THE DECISION'S FINAL. AS FAR AS THE COMMISSION IS CONCERNED, GRAVITON KILLED GADGET. END OF STORY.

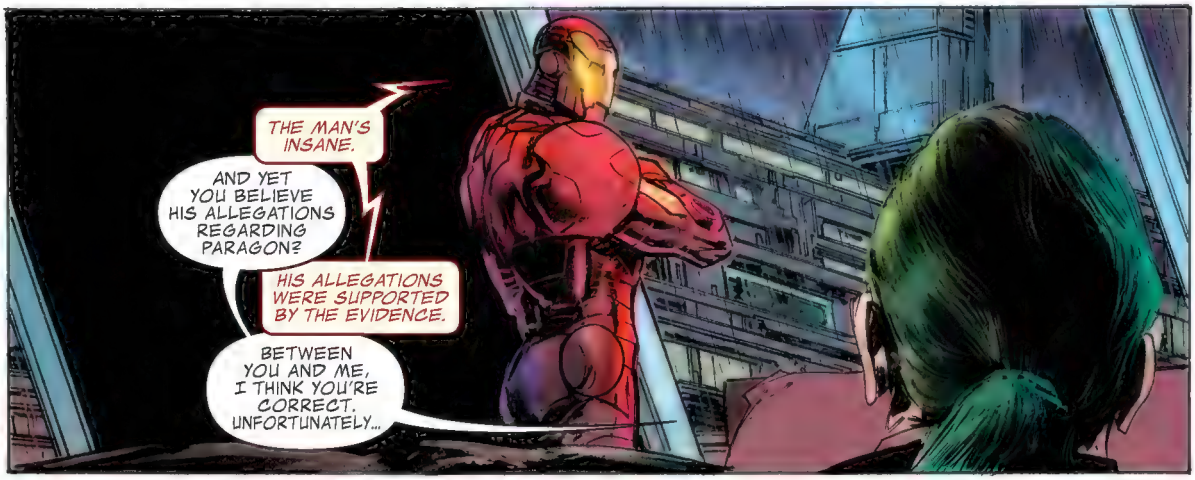

BUT WHAT ABOUT PARAGON?
THEY'VE REFERRED THE ENTIRE MATTER FOR INTERNAL REVIEW.
AS THINGS STAND, THEY'RE CALLING HIS ATTACK ON THE HELICARRIER THE RESULT OF SOME KIND OF "MENTAL BREAKDOWN."
THE OLD WHITEWASH. FIGURES. SO WHAT'S OUR NEXT MOVE?

THERE IS NO "NEXT MOVE."
WE PACK IT UP, FLY THIS TUB INTO NYC DRY DOCK TO EFFECT REPAIRS AND AWAIT ORDERS FOR OUR NEXT ASSIGNMENT.
BUT--
MAKE IT HAPPEN, TIMOTHY. I'LL BE IN MY QUARTERS. CALL ME WHEN WE'RE READY TO DISEMBARK.

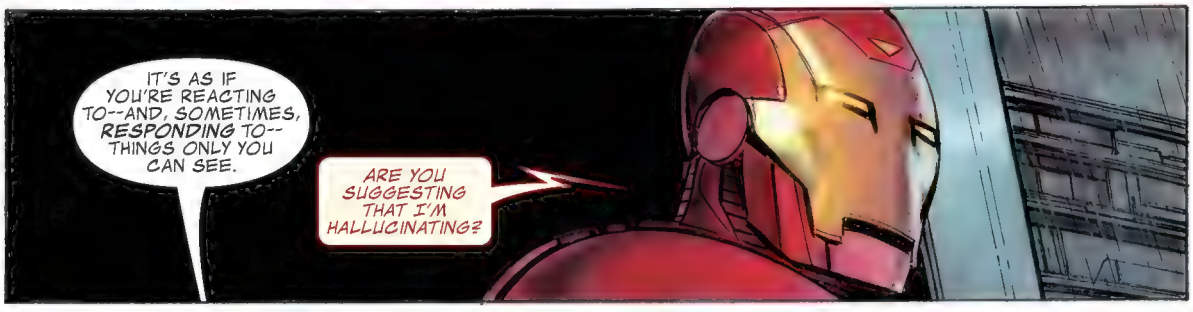

"THE OLD WHITEWASH." YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT. YOU'D THINK DUGAN WOULD BE USED TO IT BY NOW.
YOU'D THINK I WOULD.
DAMN IT! I'M NO CLOSER TO SOLVING THIS THAN I WAS WHEN WE STARTED! THE ONLY TWO EYEWITNESSES I HAD ARE DEAD.


ALL I'M LEFT WITH IS A STACK OF RANDOM MISSING-PERSON REPORTS AND--WAIT! SOMEBODY'S INSIDE MY OFFICE!

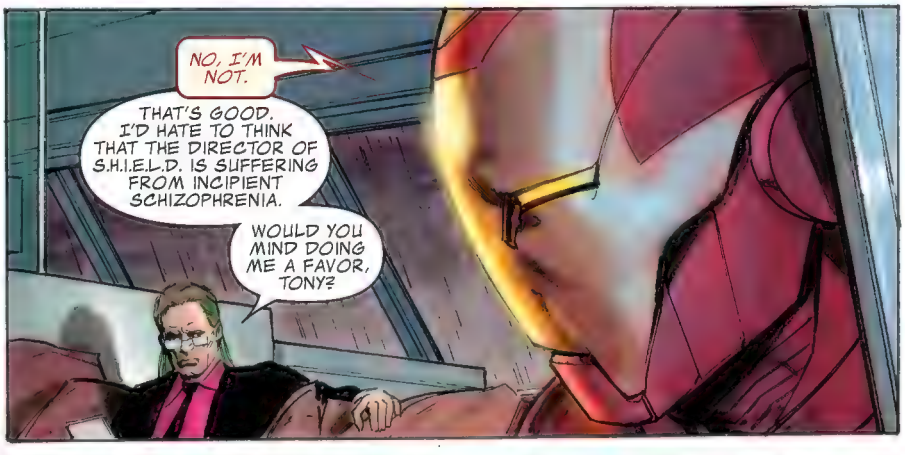
FREEZE!
PLEASE, TONY. HAVE A SEAT.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY QUARTERS, LEONARD?
I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE BEST TO BE DISCREET, GIVEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES.
PLEASE, TONY. CLOSE THE DOOR.
YOU SEE THEM, TOO!
WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
YOU KNOW...
THE DEAD...
THE ONES YOU FAILED...
KLIK
HOW ABOUT IT?


THE MAN'S INSANE.
AND YET YOU BELIEVE HIS ALLEGATIONS REGARDING PARAGON?
HIS ALLEGATIONS WERE SUPPORTED BY THE EVIDENCE.
BETWEEN YOU AND ME, I THINK YOU'RE CORRECT. UNFORTUNATELY...

...I THINK GRAVITON'S OBSERVATION OF YOUR CURRENT PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE IS CORRECT AS WELL.
I'VE REVIEWED VIDEO RECORDS OF YOUR BEHAVIOR ON THE HELICARRIER.
THERE ARE MOMENTS DURING WHICH YOU FALL INTO BRIEF DISSOCIATIVE FUGUE STATES...

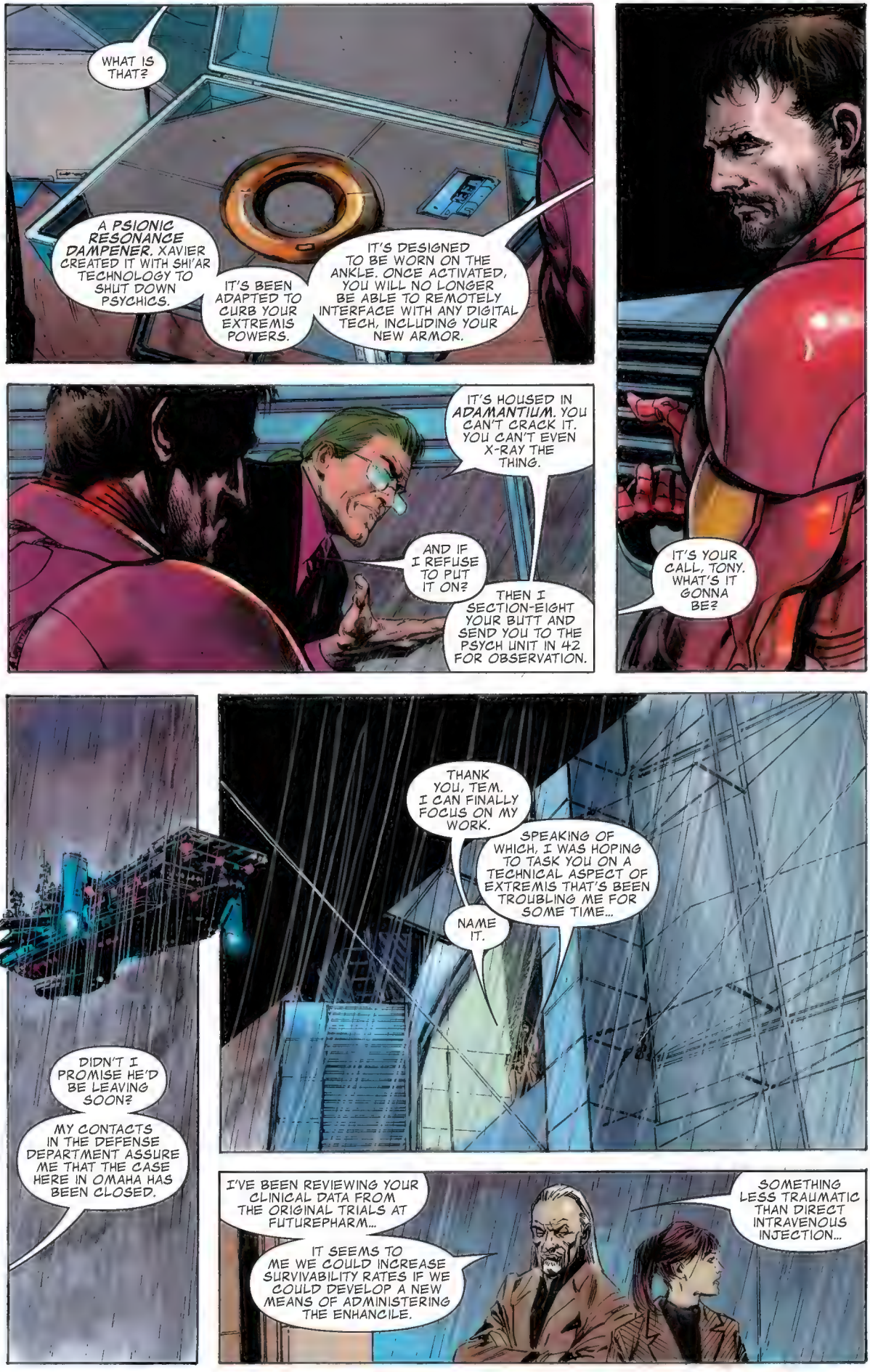

IT'S AS IF YOU'RE REACTING TO--AND, SOMETIMES, RESPONDING TO--THINGS ONLY YOU CAN SEE.
ARE YOU SUGGESTING THAT I'M HALLUCINATING?

ARE YOU?


NO, I'M NOT.
THAT'S GOOD. I'D HATE TO THINK THAT THE DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D. IS SUFFERING FROM INCIPIENT SCHIZOPHRENIA.
WOULD YOU MIND DOING ME A FAVOR, TONY?

COULD YOU REMOVE YOUR HELMET?
WHY?
PLEASE. JUST...HUMOR ME.

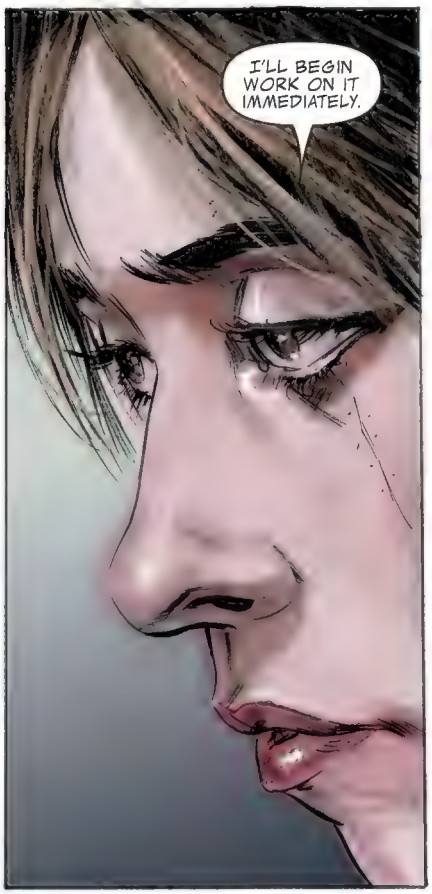
THERE. HAPPY?
OH, TONY... WHAT'RE YOU DOING TO YOURSELF, MAN?
HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN LOCKED UP IN THAT TIN CAN?
NOT LONG. A WEEK, MAYBE...
WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM?
GIMME A BREAK, LEONARD! SAVE THE "MEN-ARE-FROM-PLANET-HULK" CRAP FOR YOUR NEXT SELF-HELP BOOK. I REALLY DON'T NEED THIS!
THEN I'M AFRAID YOU LEAVE ME NO CHOICE...
YOU NEED REST, TONY. I'M RECOMMENDING YOU BE PLACED ON TWO WEEKS PERSONAL LEAVE, EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY...
...DURING WHICH TIME, YOU WILL REPORT TO ME FOR FORMAL PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS.
WHAT?! YOU DON'T HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO DO THAT!
OH, BUT I DO. UNDER AMENDMENT FOUR, PARAGRAPH TWENTY-TWO, SUBCHAPTER F OF THE SUPERHUMAN REGISTRATION ACT.
YOU SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH IT. I UNDERSTAND YOU WROTE IT.
ONE MORE THING...


WHAT IS THAT?
A PSIONIC RESONANCE DAMPENER. XAVIER CREATED IT WITH SHI'AR TECHNOLOGY TO SHUT DOWN PSYCHICS.
IT'S BEEN ADAPTED TO CURB YOUR EXTREMIS POWERS.
IT'S DESIGNED TO BE WORN ON THE ANKLE. ONCE ACTIVATED, YOU WILL NO LONGER BE ABLE TO REMOTELY INTERFACE WITH ANY DIGITAL TECH, INCLUDING YOUR NEW ARMOR.
IT'S HOUSED IN ADAMANTIUM. YOU CAN'T CRACK IT. YOU CAN'T EVEN X-RAY THE THING.
AND IF I REFUSE TO PUT IT ON?
THEN I SECTION-EIGHT YOUR BUTT AND SEND YOU TO THE PSYCH UNIT IN 42 FOR OBSERVATION.
IT'S YOUR CALL, TONY. WHAT'S IT GONNA BE?
THANK YOU, TEM. I CAN FINALLY FOCUS ON MY WORK.
SPEAKING OF WHICH, I WAS HOPING TO TASK YOU ON A TECHNICAL ASPECT OF EXTREMIS THAT'S BEEN TROUBLING ME FOR SOME TIME...
NAME IT.
DIDN'T I PROMISE HE'D BE LEAVING SOON?
MY CONTACTS IN THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT ASSURE ME THAT THE CASE HERE IN OMAHA HAS BEEN CLOSED.
I'VE BEEN REVIEWING YOUR CLINICAL DATA FROM THE ORIGINAL TRIALS AT FUTUREPHARM...
IT SEEMS TO ME WE COULD INCREASE SURVIVABILITY RATES IF WE COULD DEVELOP A NEW MEANS OF ADMINISTERING THE ENHANCILE.
SOMETHING LESS TRAUMATIC THAN DIRECT INTRAVENOUS INJECTION...

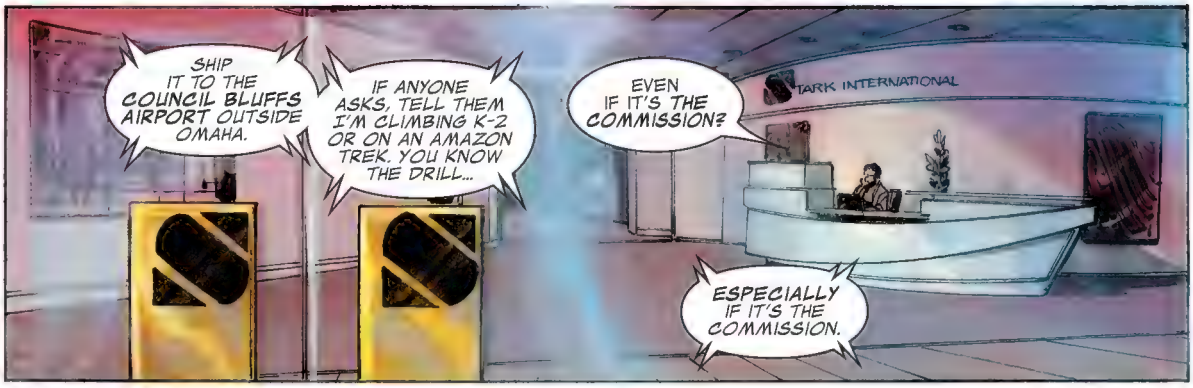
MAYBE AN AEROSOL VERSION? WE COULD DEVELOP AN INHALER...
YOU'RE A GENIUS, MAYA! THAT'S EXACTLY THE KIND OF THING I HAD IN MIND! HOW LONG WOULD IT TAKE?
WELL...I DEVELOPED AN AIRBORNE NANO-CAM FOR S.H.I.E.L.D. SOME OF THE TECH MAY BE APPLICABLE, BUT...

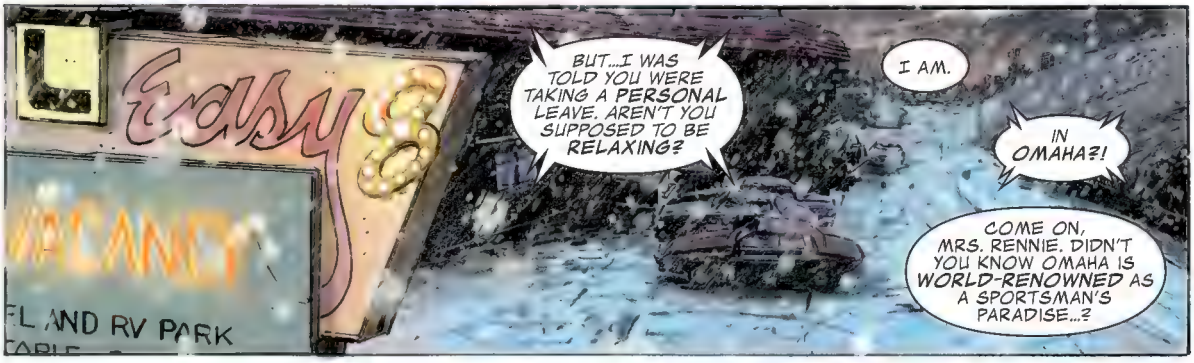
YES...?
IT'S PROPRIETARY UNDER STARK-TECH PATENTS.
OH, MAYA...

...HASN'T TONY STARK STOOD IN YOUR WAY LONG ENOUGH? DOES HE HOLD A PATENT ON YOUR MIND?
ISN'T IT TIME TO STEP OUT OF HIS SHADOW?


I'LL BEGIN WORK ON IT IMMEDIATELY.

STARK TOWER, MANHATTAN
MRS. RENNIE, I'D LIKE YOU TO AIRFREIGHT MY CAR OUT BY CORPORATE JET. YOU KNOW, THE CLASSIC MODEL.
ARE YOU SURE, MR. STARK? IT'S BEEN AGES SINCE YOU'VE DRIVEN IT, AND THE LAST TIME, I BELIEVE YOU COMPLAINED IT HANDLED LIKE--
--A RIVER BARGE, I REMEMBER. BUT I'M AFRAID IT'LL HAVE TO DO.


SHIP IT TO THE COUNCIL BLUFFS AIRPORT OUTSIDE OMAHA.
IF ANYONE ASKS, TELL THEM I'M CLIMBING K-2 OR ON AN AMAZON TREK. YOU KNOW THE DRILL...
EVEN IF IT'S THE COMMISSION?
STARK INTERNATIONAL
ESPECIALLY IF IT'S THE COMMISSION.


BUT...I WAS TOLD YOU WERE TAKING A PERSONAL LEAVE. AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE RELAXING?
I AM.
IN OMAHA?!
COME ON, MRS. RENNIE. DIDN'T YOU KNOW OMAHA IS WORLD-RENOWNED AS A SPORTSMAN'S PARADISE...?

I UNDERSTAND THE HUNTING IS EXCELLENT.
WANTED BY FBI
TWO DEAD FOLLOWING EXPLOSION
GADGET MISSING
TRAGEDY STRIKES
TO BE CONTINUED...

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WHEN BILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK DONS SOPHISTICATED STEEL-MESH ARMOR OF HIS OWN DESIGN, HE BECOMES A LIVING HIGH-TECH WEAPON--THE WORLD'S GREATEST HUMAN FIGHTING MACHINE.

THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

PREVIOUSLY...

As head of the global peacekeeping force S.H.I.E.L.D., Tony Stark has established the Initiative, which places trained super heroes in locations throughout the U.S. But Initiative efforts in Omaha took a bad turn when young heroes Gadget and Paragon confronted the mentally-unstable villain Graviton. Now, all three have died. Unbeknownst to Stark, the Mandarin is behind all their deaths.

While Stark continues to seek answers, the Mandarin – passing himself off as scientist-industrialist Tem Borjigin – tries to keep him away. "Borjigin" is working under government contract to research the Extremis virus, aided by former S.H.I.E.L.D. scientist Maya Hansen. This arrangement is unknown to Stark, who was told that Maya committed suicide.

While Stark continues to receive disturbing visitations – and clues – from visions of people he recently lost, he begins to suspect that Gadget's death relates to her investigations into unsolved Missing Persons cases. But while Stark knows he's on the right track, his friend Doc Samson confronts him about his growing obsessiveness. Stark ignores him, fleeing to a nondescript motel in Omaha to continue his search.

HAUNTED

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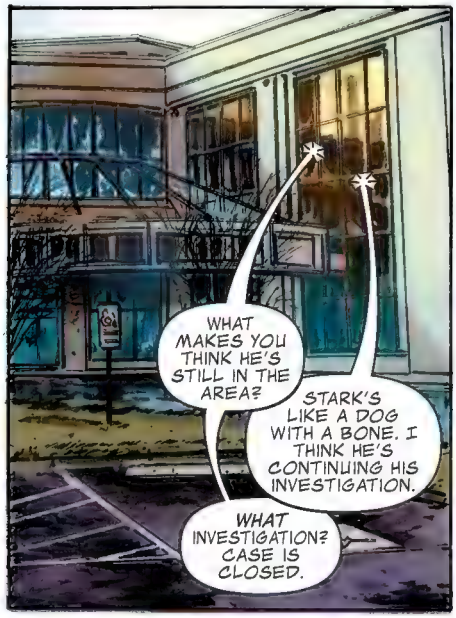
OMAHA, NEBRASKA
WHAT IS THE COMMON THREAD?
VICTIM PROFILES ARE USELESS. MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN...VARIOUS RACES, BACKGROUNDS...
THE ONLY THING THEY SEEM TO HAVE IN COMMON IS THAT THEY'RE GONE.
BUT WHY?!
I SMELL HIM BEFORE I SEE HIM...
THERE ARE FOUR COMMON CLINICAL PHASES IN ANY DRUG'S DEVELOPMENT.
WHA--
THE ROTTEN-EGG STENCH OF METABOLIC ACIDS, THE SHAVED COPPER OF SPILLED BLOOD...
PHASE ONE TRIALS ARE THE FIRST STEP IN HUMAN TESTING.
ANYWHERE BETWEEN TWENTY TO EIGHTY HEALTHY VOLUNTEERS ARE SELECTED TO TEST THE PHARMACOVIGILANCE, THE PHARMACOKINETICS AND THE PHARMACODYNAMICS OF THE DRUG...
HIS HANDS... OH, GOD, HIS HANDS...
I'D BE HAPPY TO WRITE THOSE TERMS ON THE BOARD, BUT MY SPELLING'S CRAP. LOOK 'EM UP.

HIS VOICE, CALM, MATTER-OF-FACT. JUST ANOTHER DAY IN CLASS...
PHASE TWO TRIALS ARE TRICKY. THE DRUG IS ADMINISTERED TO A LARGER GROUP, ANYWHERE BETWEEN TWO TO THREE HUNDRED VOLUNTEERS.
USUALLY THE DRUG FAILS THIS STEP, BUT IF NOT, WE MOVE ON TO PHASE THREE...
SAL...?
PHASE THREE INCREASES THE SUBJECT GROUP FROM THREE HUNDRED TO THREE THOUSAND. VERY EXPENSIVE. VERY TIME-CONSUMING. PHASE THREE--
SAL!
--IS COMMONLY CONDUCTED TWICE TO VALIDATE THE DRUG'S EFFICACY TO ANY AND ALL OF THE STANDARD REGULATORY AGENCIES...
I DON'T LIKE WHAT THIS JOB'S DOING TO ME, TONY.
NO!
RRRRIINGGG
RRRRIINGGG

YEH...?
MR. STARK? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YEAH, MRS. RENNIE, I'M FINE. ANY WORD ON MY CAR?
STARK TOWER, NEW YORK CITY
YOUR CAR, YES. THAT'S WHAT I WAS CALLING ABOUT.
I JUST RECEIVED WORD THAT IT'LL BE ARRIVING THIS EVENING AT SIX-TWENTY.
THANK YOU, MRS. RENNIE. ANYTHING ELSE?
AS A MATTER OF FACT, YES. DOCTOR SAMSON CALLED...
AGAIN?
OH, THAT'S GOOD. DID HE BUY IT?
HE WAS QUITE INSISTENT THIS TIME. I TOLD HIM YOU WERE RAFTING THE UPPER SUBANSARI.
INITIATIVE FIELD OFFICE, OMAHA
OF COURSE I DIDN'T BUY IT.
THAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH GUYS LIKE STARK...
...THEY THINK JUST BECAUSE THE REST OF US AREN'T AS SMART AS THEY ARE, THAT WE'RE DUMB, KNOW WHAT I MEAN?
YEAH. SO CAN YOU HELP ME OUT, CAPTAIN ULTRA?


WHAT MAKES YOU THINK HE'S STILL IN THE AREA?
STARK'S LIKE A DOG WITH A BONE. I THINK HE'S CONTINUING HIS INVESTIGATION.
WHAT INVESTIGATION? CASE IS CLOSED.

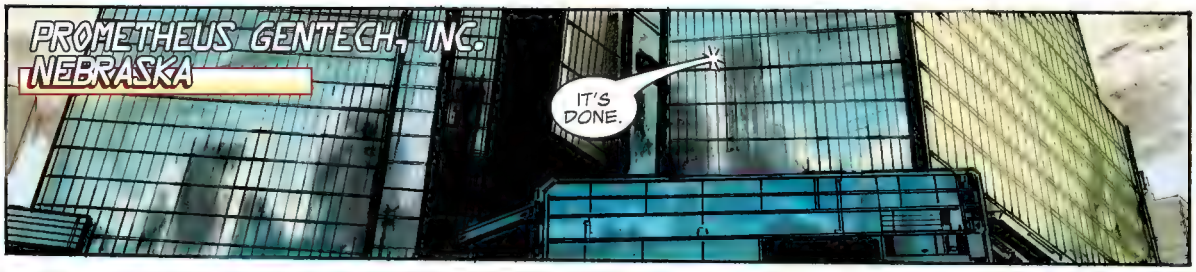
I KNOW THAT. YOU KNOW THAT...
BUT STARK DOESN'T.
SO HE'S GONE AWOL... FILE A MISSING META REPORT.
I'D KINDA LIKE TO KEEP THIS BETWEEN YOU AND ME FOR NOW.

NO CAN DO, DOC.
I'M WAY BEHIND AND UNDERSTAFFED.
I THOUGHT THE INITIATIVE WAS FAST-TRACKING OUT A COUPLE OF FRESH RECRUITS.
WHICH'LL ONLY MAKE THINGS WORSE, SINCE I'LL HAVE TO BABY-SIT THE PUNKS AND CATCH UP ON ALL THE WORK THAT PILED UP WHEN THOSE S.H.I.E.L.D. STORM TROOPERS SHUT ME DOWN.

THAT'S TOUGH, MAN. I'VE BEEN THERE. I DEAL WITH THE SAME STUFF.
YEAH?
LIKE I DON'T HAVE BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN RIDE HERD ON THE HULK? I'VE GOT A LIFE, BUT YOU'D NEVER KNOW IT...
DAMN STRAIGHT.

AND I WAS REALLY HOPING I'D BE ABLE TO CATCH THAT PITTSBURGH GAME THIS WEEKEND.
NO KIDDING. YOU A FAN?
SEASON TICKETS. LAST NINE YEARS.

MAYBE WE CAN WORK SOMETHING OUT...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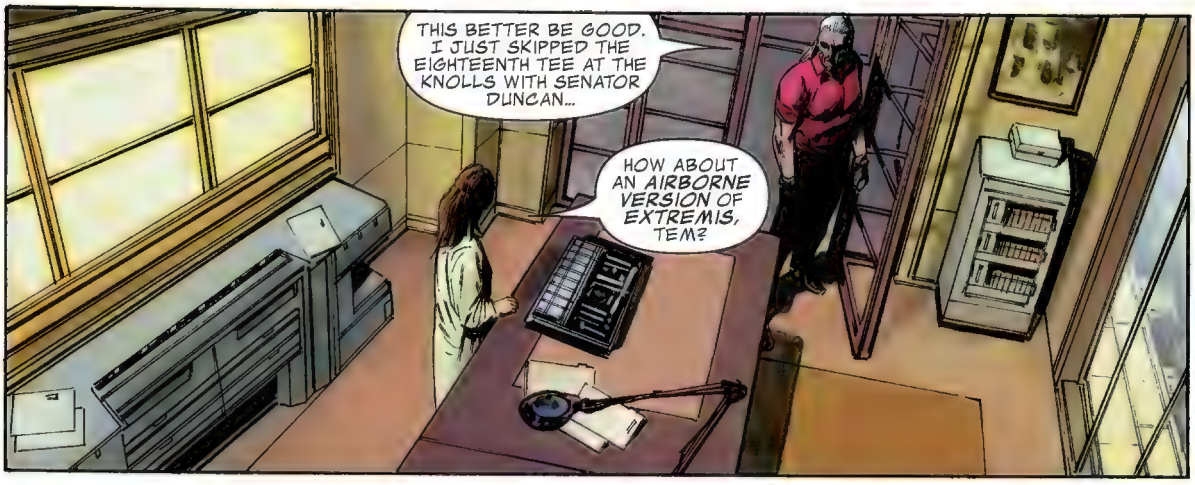
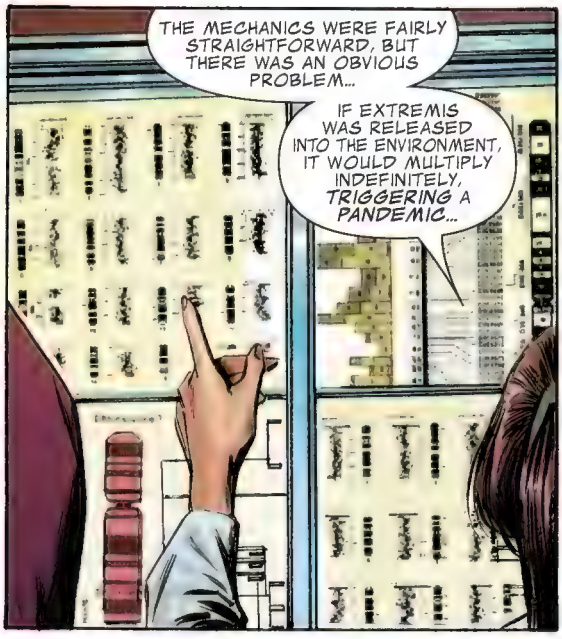
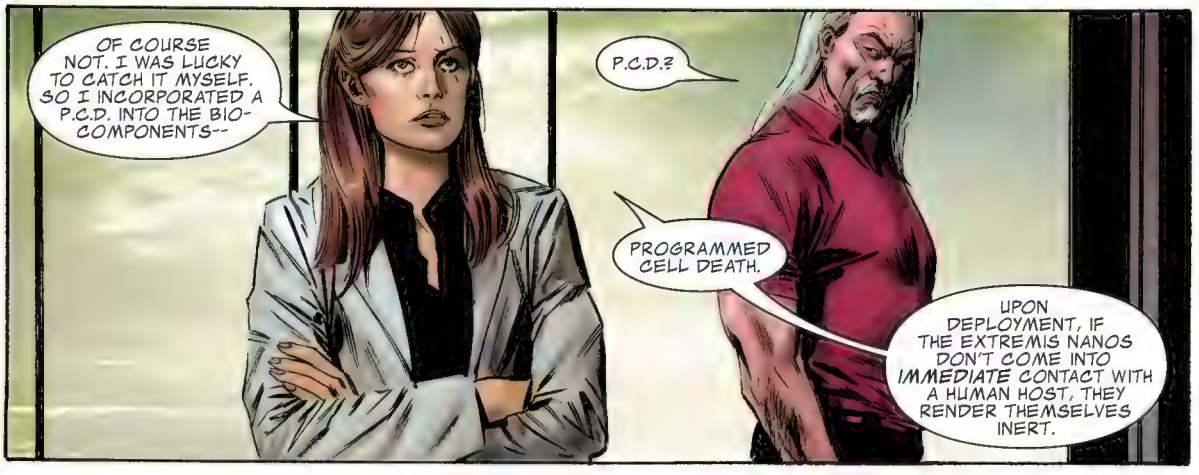
NEBRASKA
IT'S DONE.


THIS BETTER BE GOOD. I JUST SKIPPED THE EIGHTEENTH TEE AT THE KNOLLS WITH SENATOR DUNCAN...
HOW ABOUT AN AIRBORNE VERSION OF EXTREMIS, TEM?


THE MECHANICS WERE FAIRLY STRAIGHTFORWARD, BUT THERE WAS AN OBVIOUS PROBLEM...
IF EXTREMIS WAS RELEASED INTO THE ENVIRONMENT, IT WOULD MULTIPLY INDEFINITELY, TRIGGERING A PANDEMIC...

AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, WITH THE CURRENT FATALITY RATE OF NINETY-SEVEN POINT FIVE PERCENT, THE RESULTS WOULD BE CATASTROPHIC.
YOU'RE RIGHT, MAYA...

...THAT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME.

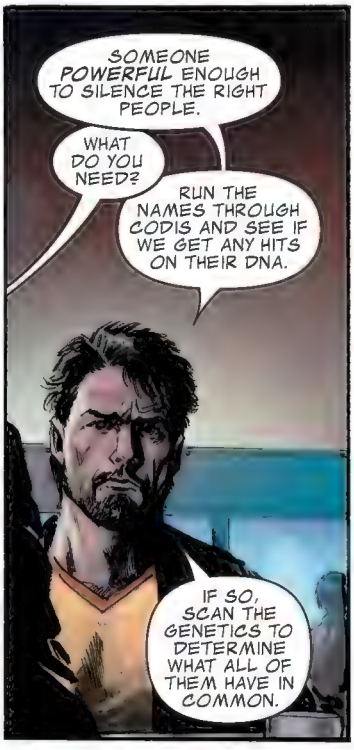

OF COURSE NOT. I WAS LUCKY TO CATCH IT MYSELF. SO I INCORPORATED A P.C.D. INTO THE BIO-COMPONENTS--
P.C.D.?
PROGRAMMED CELL DEATH.
UPON DEPLOYMENT, IF THE EXTREMIS NANOS DON'T COME INTO IMMEDIATE CONTACT WITH A HUMAN HOST, THEY RENDER THEMSELVES INERT.

THAT WAY, WE CAN STILL ADMINISTER THE ENHANCILE WITH A STANDARD INHALER WITH NO ENVIRONMENTAL RISK.
TEM...?
I'M SORRY, MAYA. IT'S JUST...
...AT MY AGE, IT'S RARE THAT ONE EXCEEDS MY EXPECTATIONS AS YOU HAVE...
BIG BETTY'S
GAS FARM
24hr RESTURANT · ICE · PARTY SNACKS
THESE PEOPLE AREN'T MISSING. THEY'VE BEEN SYSTEMATICALLY ABDUCTED.
IT OCCURRED TO ME THIS MORNING...
FIRST, JUST A DOZEN OR TWO. THEN A SECOND WAVE, THIS TIME OVER A HUNDRED...
TWO MONTHS LATER, A THIRD WAVE. ALMOST FIVE HUNDRED.
THE PATTERN CLEARLY FOLLOWS STANDARD PROTOCOLS FOR DRUG TRIALS.
SOMEBODY'S USING THESE PEOPLE AS GUINEA PIGS.

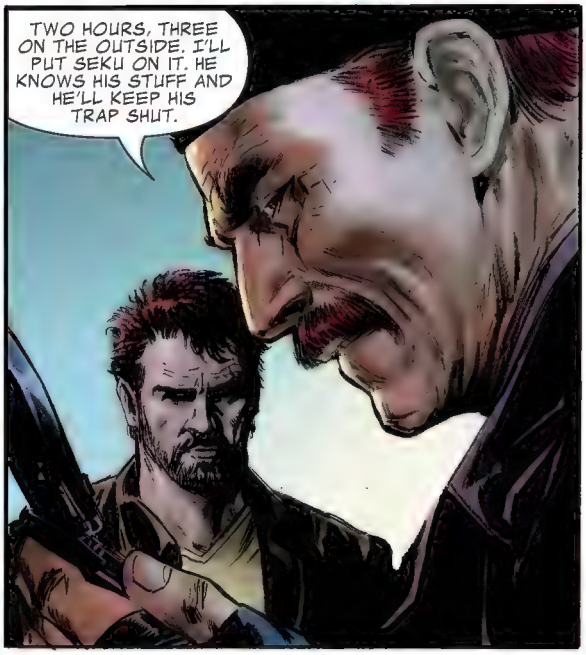
I'M NOT SURE, DUGAN, BUT I'M THINKING THERE'S A DEFINITE FAMILIAL CONNECTION.
PARAGON AND HIS MOTHER...
EXACTLY. AND HE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE. I'VE FOUND THREE OTHER SIMILAR CASES--COUSINS, SIBLINGS...

WARM UP?
YEAH, THANKS. THESE WAFFLES ARE KILLER, BY THE WAY.
JEEPERS, HANDSOME. I'LL BE SURE TO COMPLIMENT THE CHEF.
BIG

WERE YOU JUST HITTING ON HER?
SO I GOT A THING FOR WAITRESSES. WHERE WAS I...?
OH. YEAH. ANYWAY, WHAT I'M THINKING IS SOMEBODY'S CULLING SUBJECTS TO FIND SUITABLE CANDIDATES FOR RESEARCH.


SOMEONE POWERFUL ENOUGH TO SILENCE THE RIGHT PEOPLE.
WHAT DO YOU NEED?
RUN THE NAMES THROUGH CODIS AND SEE IF WE GET ANY HITS ON THEIR DNA.
IF SO, SCAN THE GENETICS TO DETERMINE WHAT ALL OF THEM HAVE IN COMMON.

TALL ORDER.
I'D DO IT MYSELF IF IT WASN'T FOR THIS DAMNED POWER DAMPENER.

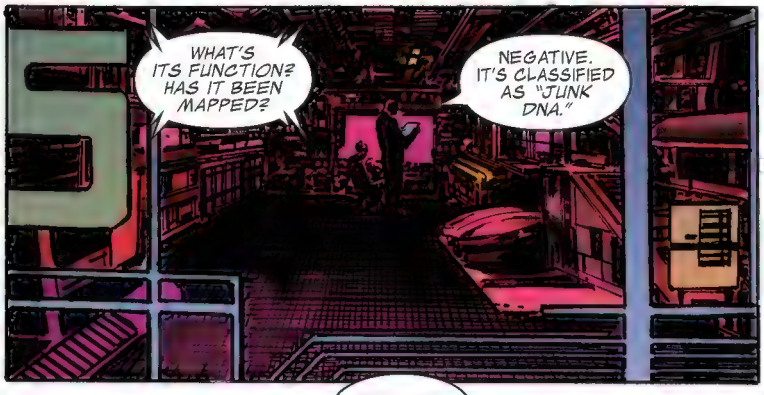

TWO HOURS, THREE ON THE OUTSIDE. I'LL PUT SEKU ON IT. HE KNOWS HIS STUFF AND HE'LL KEEP HIS TRAP SHUT.

GOOD CALL. KEEP ME POSTED.
WHERE YOU GOING?
GOTTA CHECK OUT A CAR.
LABORATORY 19, PROMETHEUS GENTECH, INC.
THE WOMAN'S A GENIUS.
I KNOW THAT. NOW TELL ME HOW TO CRACK IT.
IT CAN'T BE DONE. SHE'S FRAGMENTED THE PROGRAMMED CELL-DEATH INTO LITERALLY THOUSANDS OF GENE SEQUENCES.
TO TAMPER WITH IT IS TO TRIGGER IT. IT CAN'T BE BYPASSED OR DEACTIVATED.
DANGER
HIGH VOLTAGE
CAUTION
RADIOACTIVE
EXPLAIN.
SHE'S BROKEN THE INSTRUCTIONS DOWN TO INDIVIDUAL BINARY SEQUENCES.
SHE THEN SCATTERED THEM THROUGHOUT THE GENETIC STRUCTURE, EMBEDDING THEM IN COMPLETELY RANDOM BINDING PROTEINS.
YOU'RE SAYING IT'S IMPOSSIBLE?

IMAGINE A FIELD OF MILLIONS OF DANDELIONS. A TORNADO PASSES THROUGH.
WHAT YOU'RE ASKING IS ANALOGOUS TO LOCATING THE SPECIFIC SEEDS OF JUST ONE OF THOSE DANDELIONS, THEN RECONSTRUCTING IT.
A SIMPLE "YES" WOULD HAVE SUFFICED, EDMUND.
BREE-BREEEP BREE-BREEEP
EXCUSE ME...
(555) 173-3561 J.KOONING
SEND
YES?
STARK'S STILL IN OMAHA.
HOW DO YOU KNOW?
HOMELAND SECURITY JUST CONFIRMED IT. A LARGE CRATE IDENTIFIED AS MEDICAL EQUIPMENT WAS SHIPPED TO COUNCIL BLUFFS AIRPORT.
THEY TRIED TO COVER THEIR TRACKS THROUGH HALF A DOZEN CORPORATE SHELLS, BUT THE SHIPMENT ORIGINATED FROM STARK INDUSTRIES...
COMMERCIAL FREIGHT. HE KNEW WE'D BE KEEPING AN EYE ON HIS COMPANY FLEET.
THANK YOU FOR THE INFORMATION, SECRETARY KOONING...
IVE
LS
CAUTION
RADIOACTIVE I
7
I'LL SEE TO IT THAT WE TAKE THE APPROPRIATE PRECAUTIONS.

COUNCIL BLUFFS AIRPORT, NEBRASKA
Council Bluffs Aviation
N74RSP
WHAT'VE YOU GOT FOR ME, DUGAN?
GOOD NEWS, YOU WERE RIGHT. BAD NEWS...

...YOU WERE RIGHT.
EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THE MISSING PERSONS IN THE THIRD WAVE OF ABDUCTIONS SHARED A COMMON DNA SEQUENCE.


WHAT'S ITS FUNCTION? HAS IT BEEN MAPPED?
NEGATIVE. IT'S CLASSIFIED AS "JUNK DNA."

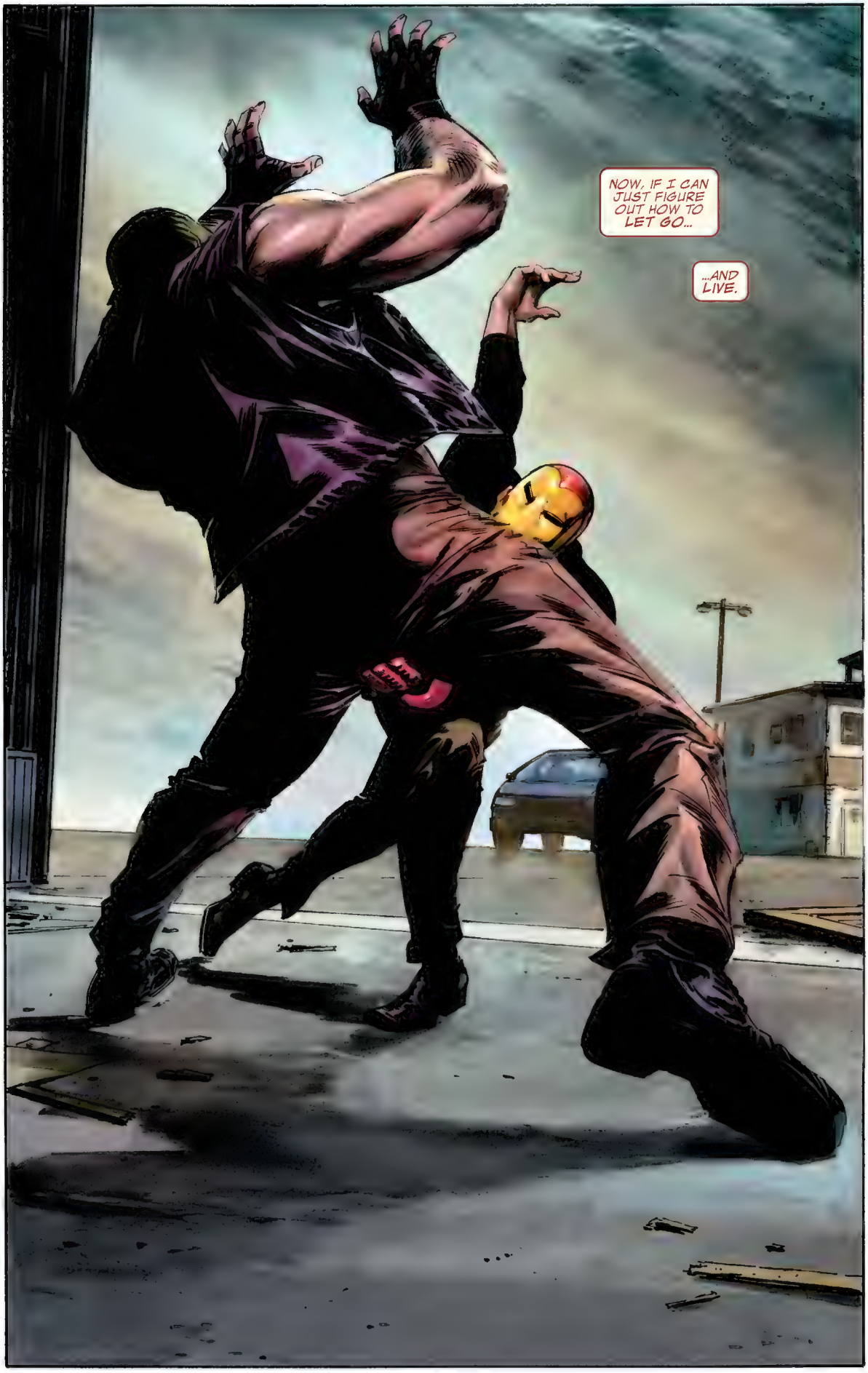
DIRECTOR STARK...?
YOU STILL THERE...?

...DIRECTOR STARK--
DUGAN, LISTEN TO ME...
I NEED TO CHECK ONE MORE SUBJECT'S DNA! SEE IF IT CONTAINS THAT SEQUENCE YOU FOUND IN COMMON WITH THE OTHERS...
WHOSE...?

MINE.
REBOOT WEAPONS SYSTEMS...
REBOOTING WEAPONS SYSTEMS...
UPLOAD AVIONICS BATCH FILE... SI-22866784...
UPLOADING...
DAMN... FORGOT HOW LONG THIS USED TO TAKE...
REQUEST INTERRUPT BOOT SEQUENCE? Y/N.
JEEZ, WHAT NOW...?
FINE. YES. INTERRUPT DIAGNOSTICS PROTOCOL. STATUS?
CODE RED PROXIMITY ALERT.
AWW, CRA--
KUNG!

WHOEVER THIS GUY IS...
...I'VE ONLY BEEN HIT THIS WAY ONCE BEFORE. IT CAN'T BE...
ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.
ZERO CLIP!!
AWWJEEZ...
HE'S EXTREMIS-ENHANCED.

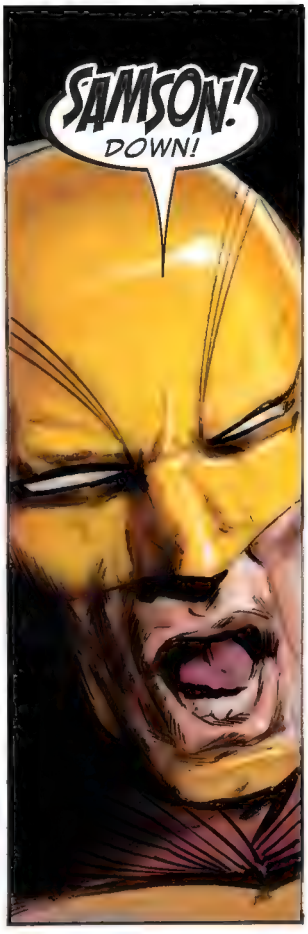
GUH!
KERR-RANGG
NUUUHHHHHH...
HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHUUUUUUU...
KRUNCH


NOW, IF I CAN JUST FIGURE OUT HOW TO LET GO...
...AND LIVE.

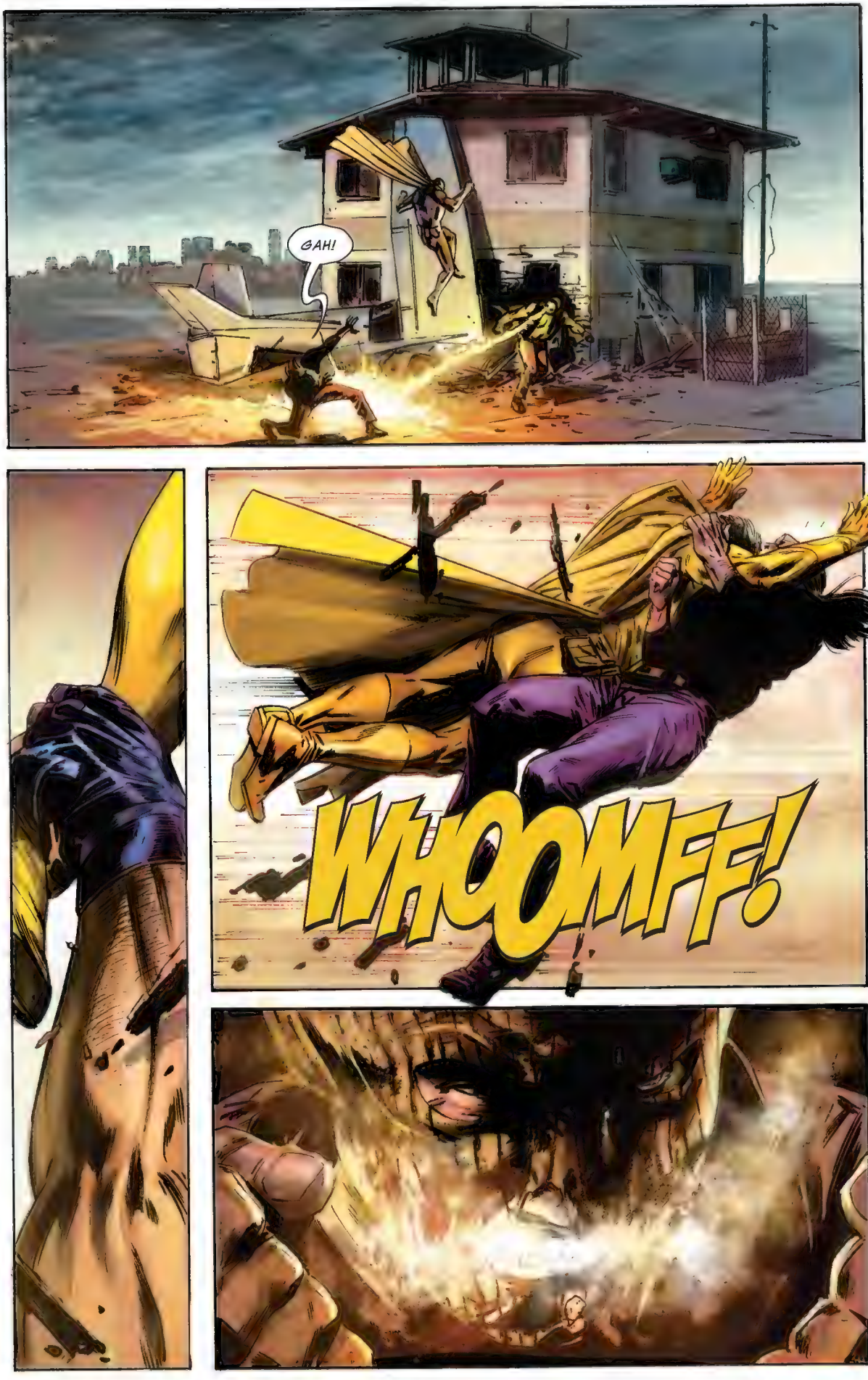
Council Bluffs Aviation
KABOOM!
THERE GOES MY CAR RENTAL DEPOSIT...

uffs Aviation
HHK--!
SHH-
KRRACK!

WHOMP-
SPLAT!


SAMSON!
DOWN!

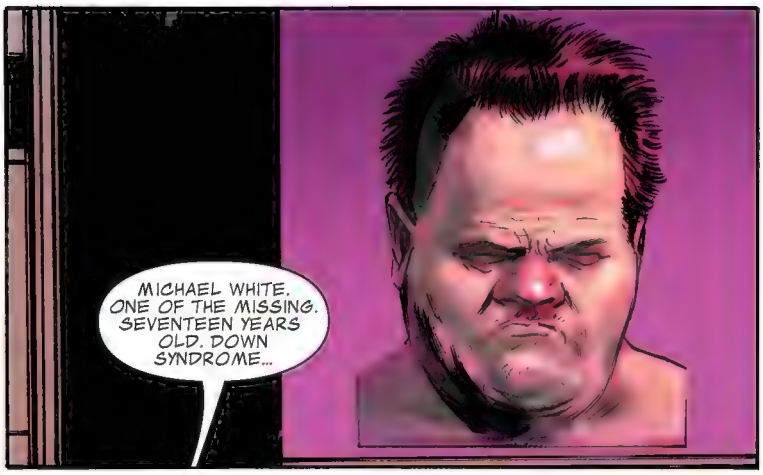
Council Bluffs Avia


GAH!
WHOOMFF!

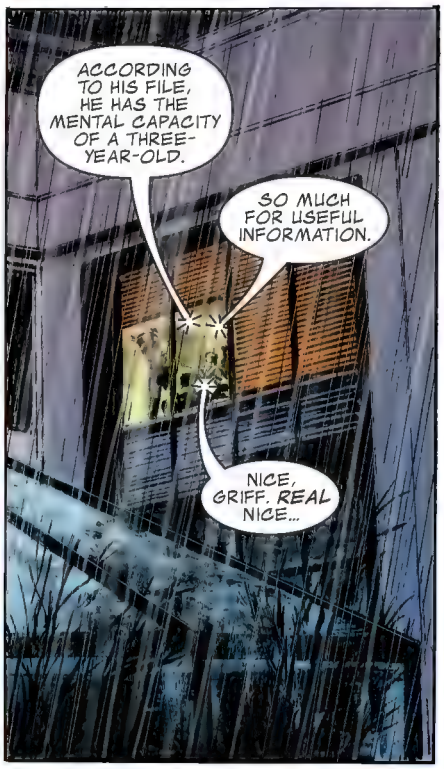
SHOULDN'T PLAY WITH FIRE...
KRACK!
...YOU MIGHT GET BURNED!
SSS-BOOM!
BRRR-ZAAPP!
FIRE...IT HAD TO BE FIRE...
TONY... WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?
YOU GOT YOUR BLACK BAG, DOC?
IN MY CAR...
BETTER DRAW A KING-SIZED SHOT OF THORAZINE.
THAT PULSE-BOLT SUCKED MY BATTERIES DRY, AND SOMETHING TELLS ME THIS ONE ISN'T GONNA BE OUT LONG.

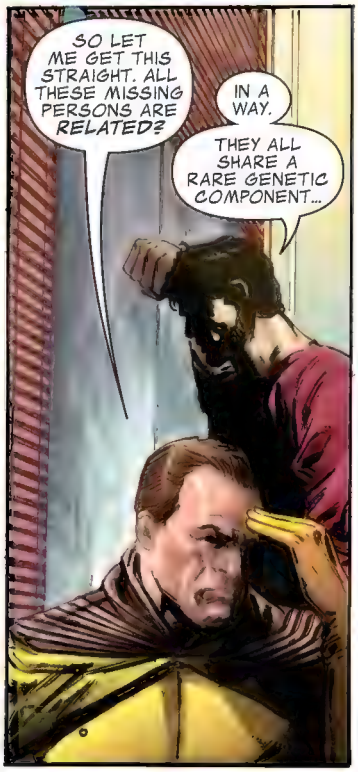
LET'S SEE WHO WE'RE DEALING WITH...
MAYBE HE CAN ANSWER A FEW QUESTIONS WHEN HE COMES AROUND.

THE HELL...?


MICHAEL WHITE. ONE OF THE MISSING. SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD. DOWN SYNDROME...

HE DISAPPEARED FROM A RESIDENTIAL FACILITY OUTSIDE LINCOLN, NEBRASKA SIX MONTHS AGO...


ACCORDING TO HIS FILE, HE HAS THE MENTAL CAPACITY OF A THREE-YEAR-OLD.
SO MUCH FOR USEFUL INFORMATION.
NICE, GRIFF. REAL NICE...


SO LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT. ALL THESE MISSING PERSONS ARE RELATED?
IN A WAY.
THEY ALL SHARE A RARE GENETIC COMPONENT...

...ITS FUNCTION WASN'T CLEAR TO ME UNTIL DUGAN GAVE ME THE FINAL PIECE OF THE PUZZLE...
...THAT YOU POSSESS THE SAME GENE.
YES. A NATURAL RESISTANCE TO THE VIOLENT EFFECTS OF THE EXTREMIS METAMORPHOSIS.
MY GOD...
...WHAT KIND OF A MONSTER WOULD TEST EXTREMIS ON A MENTALLY DISABLED CHILD?
ONLY ONE.
WHO?
C'MON, LEONARD. YOU'RE A SHRINK. YOU DON'T REALLY WANT ME TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION, DO YOU?
IF I DID, YOU'D HAVE TO LOCK ME UP.
TO BE CONTINUED...

IRON MAN 05.02.08
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KNAUF
DE LA TORRE
WHITE

IRON MAN®

DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D.

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WHEN BILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK DONS SOPHISTICATED STEEL-MESH ARMOR OF HIS OWN DESIGN, HE BECOMES A LIVING HIGH-TECH WEAPON--THE WORLD'S GREATEST HUMAN FIGHTING MACHINE.

THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

PREVIOUSLY...

After two young heroes were killed serving in the Initiative program that he runs, Tony Stark has picked up where one of them left off, investigating a series of Missing Persons cases in Nebraska.

While Stark searches for a link among the missing, his former colleague Maya Hansen – believed dead – is conducting her own research, on the dangerous and powerful Extremis virus. She finds a way to release Extremis without harming the populace, which secretly disappoints her employer, Tem Borjigin. Unknown to Maya, "Tem" is actually the super-villain Mandarin in disguise.

Stark goes to bring his old Iron Man armor out of retirement, but is promptly attacked by an Extremis-enhanced assailant. After Doc Samson and Captain Ultra come to Tony's aid, they learn the attacker is a 17-year-old boy afflicted with Down syndrome – and one of the abductees from Tony's investigation.

After examining the unconscious boy, they learn that the common factor among all the abductees is a resistance to the violent effects of Extremis. It's a characteristic that Tony himself shares.

HAUNTED

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PROMETHEUS
GENTECH, INC.,
NEBRASKA.
YOU WANTED TO SEE ME, TEM?
PLEASE, HAVE A SEAT, MAYA. I HAVE SOME VERY TROUBLING NEWS...
THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT WILL NOT CONTINUE THE EXTREMIS PROJECT WITH PROGRAMMED CELL DEATH INTACT.
YOU EITHER MUST REMOVE IT, OR DOCUMENT IT AND PROVIDE THEM WITH THE ENCODING SEQUENCE.
THAT... THAT'S CRAZY.
DON'T THEY KNOW THE RISKS? WITHOUT P.C.D., EXTREMIS COULD DISPERSE LIKE AN AIRBORNE VIRUS...
THAT'S WHAT I TOLD THEM, BUT THEY REFUSED TO LISTEN!
BUREAUCRATIC IDIOTS...!
APPARENTLY, THEY FEEL THAT AN OPEN ARCHITECTURE IS CRITICAL, AND IT'S THEIR JOB TO SAFEGUARD THE PUBLIC FROM ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE.

TELL THEM IT'S OUT OF THE QUESTION.
I WOULD, IF IT WAS JUST ME. BUT I HAVE OVER FOUR HUNDRED EMPLOYEES ON THE PAYROLL...
THEY NOT ONLY THREATENED TO DE-FUND THE PROJECT, BUT TO SUE US INTO THE STONE AGE FOR BREACH OF CONTRACT.
I'M SORRY, MAYA...
COME, CHILD. IT'S NOT THE END OF THE WORLD...
THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT HAS DOZENS OF LETHAL BIOLOGICAL AGENTS IN ITS POSSESSION--ANTHRAX, EBOLA--AND YET THERE'S NEVER BEEN AN OUTBREAK...
SURELY, THEY MUST HAVE ADEQUATE SAFEGUARDS...
EXTREMIS IS MY CREATION. NOT ANTHRAX. NOT EBOLA...
IF IT WAS TO BE RELEASED INTO THE ENVIRONMENT--EVEN ACCIDENTALLY...
YOU'RE RIGHT, CHILD...
TO ACCEPT SUCH A GRAVE RESPONSIBILITY...
...IT IS TOO MUCH OF ME TO ASK OF YOU.
I SEE NO OPTION BUT TO TERMINATE THE EXTREMIS PROJECT.
IT MAY SPELL THE END OF PROMETHEUS, BUT--
NO. I CAN'T LET YOU DO THAT.
WHAT CHOICE DO I HAVE?

THERE'S TOO MUCH AT STAKE. ALL THE CIVILIAN APPLICATIONS... MEDICAL, PHARMACOLOGICAL--THE ERADICATION OF DISEASE AND BIRTH DEFECTS...
COME NOW. YOU KNOW THOSE THINGS ARE OF NO INTEREST TO OUR FRIENDS IN THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT.
BUT--
I KNOW YOU WILL DO THE RIGHT THING, CHILD.
I NEED TO THINK ABOUT THIS.
OF COURSE. BUT WE MUST GIVE THEM AN ANSWER SOON.
OMAHA, NEBRASKA.
YOU TURNED ALL THIS OVER TO KOONING?
WHAT'D HE SAY?
YEAH. THE WHOLE BALL OF WAX.
HE TOLD ME TO STOP CHASING GHOSTS.
OKAY, LET'S SAY YOU'RE RIGHT. WHAT'S OUR NEXT MOVE?
LET'S SEE, UHM...MAJOR PSYCHOTIC BAD GUY...TEN RINGS OF POWER...VERY POSSIBLY EXTREMIS-ENHANCED...
AND ME, FACING HIM IN AN ARMOR SYSTEM THAT WAS CREAKY WHEN BILL WAS STILL HOT FOR HILLARY...
GEE...I DUNNO, LEN. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

SORRY, TONY. CAN'T DO THAT.
THE POWER-DAMPENER WAS PREPROGRAMMED TO STAY LOCKED ON FOR THE ENTIRE TERM OF YOUR SUSPENSION.
IT WAS THE ONLY WAY WE COULD BE SURE YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DISABLE OR CIRCUMVENT IT...
DAMN IT, LEN, PEOPLE ARE GONNA DIE IF I CAN'T ACCESS MY FULL POWERS!
AND HOW MANY MORE WILL DIE BECAUSE OF A POTENTIALLY SCHIZOPHRENIC METAHUMAN WHO REFUSES TREATMENT?
SCHIZOPHRENIC? GIMME A BREAK!
WHAT ELSE AM I SUPPOSED TO CALL IT? YOU'RE TALKING TO PEOPLE WHO AREN'T THERE! WEARING YOUR ARMOR FOR WEEKS AT A TIME!
DOES THAT SOUND HEALTHY, TONY?
ARE YOU THAT FAR GONE???
I'M NOT CRAZY.
OF COURSE YOU'RE CRAZY. WE'RE ALL CRAZY.

SANE PEOPLE WITNESS A CRIME IN PROGRESS, THEY CALL THE POLICE. GUYS LIKE US...
...WE PUT ON TIGHTS AND JUMP OUT WINDOWS.
YEAH, WELL...THERE'S CRAZY, AND THERE'S CRAZY, LIKE...
LIKE WHAT?
LIKE SEEING... GHOSTS.
GHOSTS.
NO, I MEAN...THEY'RE NOT GHOSTS. NOT REALLY. I KNOW THAT MUCH.
THEY'RE DEAD, YEAH, BUT...I KNOW THEY'RE NOT REAL. WHEN I SEE THEM...IT'S MORE LIKE...LIKE A DREAM...
...ONLY I'M AWAKE.
WHO DO YOU SEE?
CAP...SAL. GADGET, YOU KNOW--THE ONES WHO DIED...
THEY...SAY THINGS.
WHAT DO THEY SAY, TONY?
THAT'S THE THING...
THEY GIVE ME INFORMATION ABOUT... ABOUT HOW TO LOOK AT THE EVIDENCE. POINT ME IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION...
I WOULD NEVER HAVE GOTTEN THIS FAR IN MY INVESTIGATION IF THEY HADN'T, YOU KNOW...
...HELPED.
HAVE THEY EVER TOLD YOU ANYTHING IRRELEVANT... NONSENSICAL?
NO. EVERYTHING THEY SAID WAS COMPLETELY SOUND.
INTERESTING...
WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?

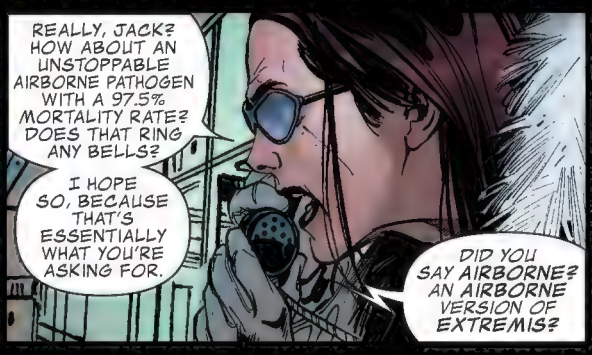
EXTREMIS REWROTE YOUR ENTIRE BODY INTO SOMETHING COMPLETELY NEW. ENHANCED ENDURANCE, ENHANCED RESTORATIVE ABILITY, ENHANCED MOTOR FUNCTIONS, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY...
... SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCED BRAIN FUNCTIONS.
AT ONE LEVEL, YOU'RE PROCESSING INFORMATION AT LIGHT SPEED, CONNECTING RANDOM DATA LIKE A SUPERCOMPUTER...
MEANWHILE, YOUR NORMAL THOUGHT PROCESSES ARE STILL FUNCTIONING AT A STANDARD, HUMAN LEVEL.
SIMPLY PUT, YOUR BRAIN'S TAKING IN MORE INFORMATION THAN IT CAN PROCESS, SO IT'S STORING IT, SUBLIMATING IT IN YOUR UNCONSCIOUS MIND--LIKE A RESERVOIR.
YOUR HALLUCINATIONS ARE SPILLOVER. INFORMATION TOO URGENT, TOO IMPORTANT TO REMAIN OUT OF PLAY.
SO WHY THE DEAD PEOPLE?
YOU'RE STUFFING ALL THIS EXCESS DATA INTO THE SAME PLACE WE NORMALLY FILL UP WITH GUILT, PAIN, REGRET...ALL THE UGLY STUFF WE DON'T WANT TO FACE.
WE ALL HAVE GHOSTS... DEMONS...
IN YOUR CASE, THEY'RE FUNCTIONING AS MESSENGERS.
NO. THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.
I MEAN, CAP, HAPPY HOGAN, SAL, GADGET...YEAH. I FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM.
BUT THERE'S LOTS OF OTHERS-- OTHERS THAT I HAVEN'T SEEN, LIKE--
--MAYA HANSEN.
OH MY GOD...

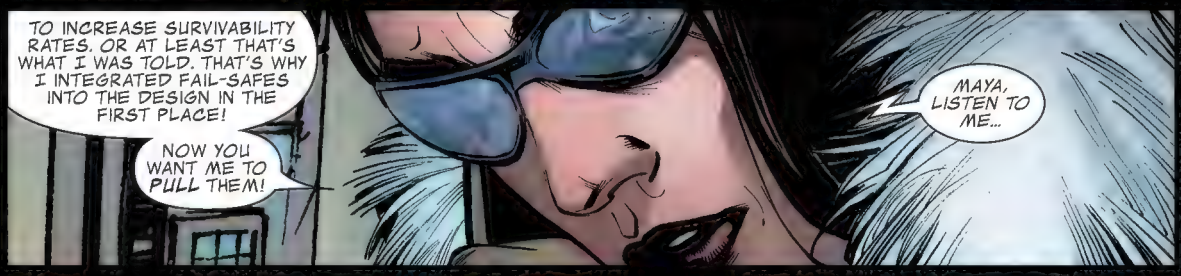
"...SHE'S STILL ALIVE!"
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING, JACK?
Public Pay Telephone

WASHINGTON, D.C.
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE JACK KOONING'S TOWNHOUSE
WHO IS THIS?
HERE'S A HINT: LAST TIME WE TALKED, YOUR DISINFORMATION UNIT WAS TAKING PICTURES OF ME IN A BATHTUB FULL OF COLD PIG'S BLOOD--
ARE YOU ON A SECURE LINE?

SCREW YOU AND YOUR SECURE LINE.
YOU TOLD ME THIS WAS A SUPER-SOLDIER PROGRAM! NOW YOU WANT ME TO TURN EXTREMIS INTO A W.M.D.?!
A WHAT?! NO! OF COURSE NOT--

DON'T PLAY STUPID WITH ME. I KNOW YOU ORDERED TEM TO DISCLOSE THE FULL ENCODING SEQUENCE!
ENCODING SEQUENCE? WHAT THE...
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.


REALLY, JACK? HOW ABOUT AN UNSTOPPABLE AIRBORNE PATHOGEN WITH A 97.5% MORTALITY RATE? DOES THAT RING ANY BELLS?
I HOPE SO, BECAUSE THAT'S ESSENTIALLY WHAT YOU'RE ASKING FOR.
DID YOU SAY AIRBORNE? AN AIRBORNE VERSION OF EXTREMIS?


TO INCREASE SURVIVABILITY RATES. OR AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT I WAS TOLD. THAT'S WHY I INTEGRATED FAIL-SAFES INTO THE DESIGN IN THE FIRST PLACE!
NOW YOU WANT ME TO PULL THEM!
MAYA, LISTEN TO ME...

TELL ME EXACTLY WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON OVER THERE.

I DEVELOPED AN AIRBORNE DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR EXTREMIS. I INTEGRATED A GENETIC KILL-SWITCH TO OBSTRUCT POTENTIAL OUTBREAKS...
LAST NIGHT, I WAS RELAYED ORDERS TO EITHER REMOVE THE SAFEGUARDS, OR OPEN UP THE ARCHITECTURE.
BY WHOSE AUTHORITY?
YOURS.
LISTEN CAREFULLY.
UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES ARE YOU TO GIVE TEM BORJIGIN THE ENCODING SEQUENCE OR ANYTHING ELSE.
YOU ARE TO RETURN TO WORK AS IF NOTHING EVER HAPPENED AND AWAIT MY CALL. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
ARE YOU SAYING--
I'M SAYING I NEVER GAVE SUCH AN ORDER. NOW STAND DOWN AND WAIT. I'LL DEAL WITH THIS FROM MY END.
MY GOD... WHAT HAVE I DONE?
I DON'T KNOW, JACK. WHY DON'T YOU FILL US IN?

H-HELP! THOMPSON...!
YOUR SECRET SERVICE MAN HAS BEEN INCAPACITATED AND I'VE SURROUNDED THIS HOUSE WITH AN ELECTRONIC CHAFF-DEVICE.
IT'S JUST YOU AND ME. NOW...
...WHERE THE HELL IS MAYA HANSEN?!
SHE'S DEAD, YOU--
HUMMFFF!
KRAAASH

SAMSON! FOR GOD'S SAKE, DO SOMETHING! STOP HIM!
I'M SORRY, MISTER SECRETARY, BUT YOU TOLD THE COMMISSION YOURSELF...
...HE'S OUT OF HIS MIND.
WHAT?! WHAT'RE YOU DOING--?!
SHE'S DEAD! SHE'S DEAD! SHE'S DEAD...!

TONY, STOP.
STARK...!
HUMPH!
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH!
I'LL HAVE YOUR HEAD--
STOP. TALKING.

YOU'VE BEEN HOUNDING STARK SINCE DAY ONE OF THE OMAHA INVESTIGATION. TRYING YOUR BEST TO KEEP HIM CLEAR OF THE TRUTH.
YOU OBVIOUSLY HAVE SOMETHING TO HIDE.
AS I'M SURE YOU KNOW, A NUMBER OF BAD THINGS ARE GOING DOWN IN NEBRASKA...
VERY BAD THINGS.
DIRECTOR STARK IS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT YOU ORCHESTRATED ALL OF IT.
AS FOR ME...
...I THINK OTHERWISE.
DESPERATION CAN MAKE A GOOD MAN DO TERRIBLE THINGS.
YOU'RE A GOOD MAN.
AREN'T YOU, JACK...?

PROMETHEUS GENTECH, LABORATORY 19
PROMETHEUS GENETECH, INC.
SHEARING, HENRY
EXTREMIS WAS MEANT TO BE THE CATALYST FOR A NEW SUPER-SOLDIER PROGRAM...
WE SENT OUT R.F.P.S TO A DOZEN OF OUR PRIVATE SECTOR CONTRACTORS...
WE DECIDED TO GO WITH PROMETHEUS GENTECH OUT OF OMAHA...

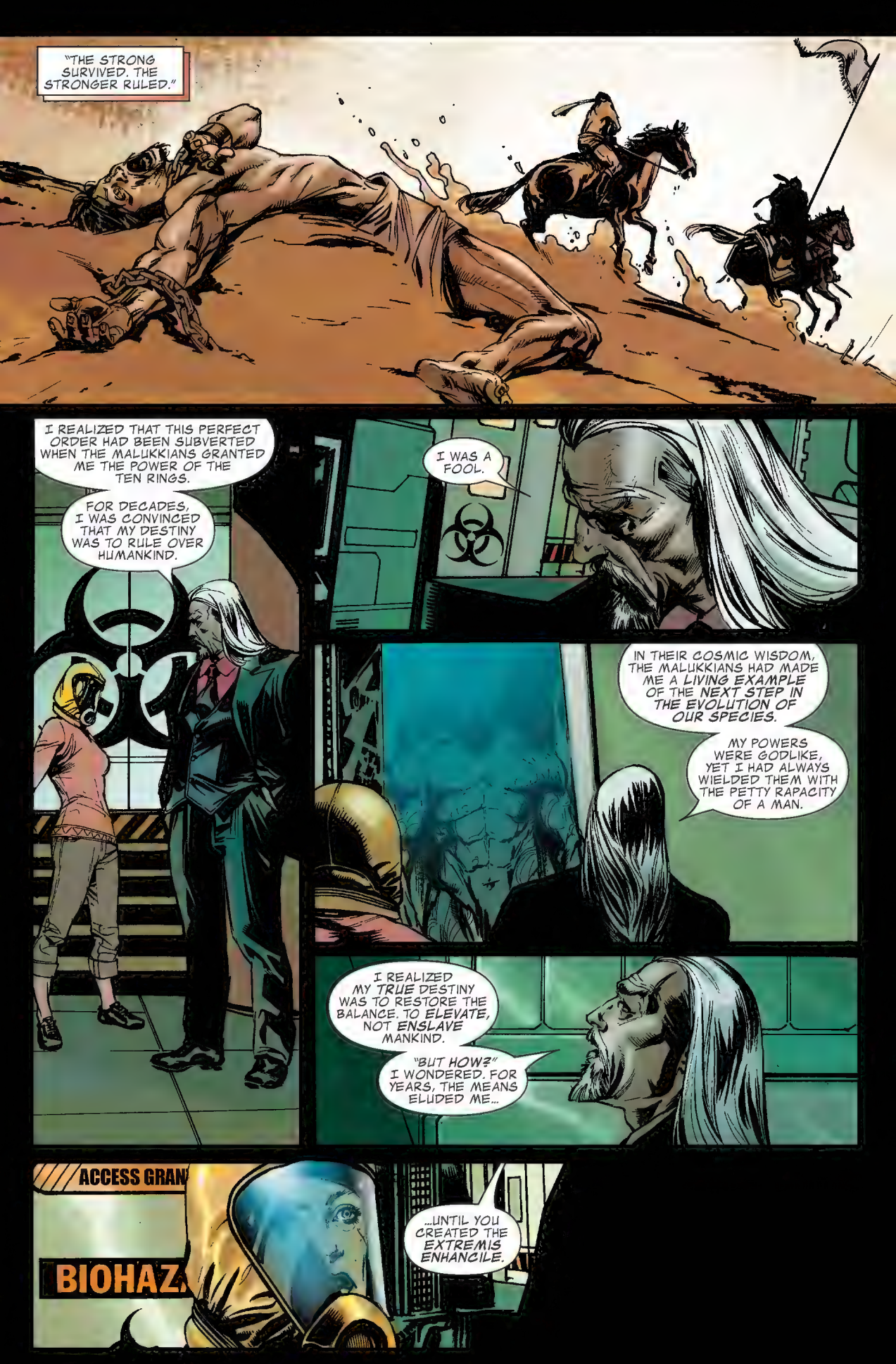
"THEY HAD THE FACILITIES, THE RESOURCES AND THE KNOW-HOW. THE ONLY MISSING PIECE IN THE PUZZLE WAS ITS CREATOR...
BEEP
FIRE CONTROL
17
"...MAYA HANSEN.
OPEN
AKR-BIO
"SHE ACCEPTED OUR OFFER. WE FAKED HER DEATH IN PARIS AND TURNED HER OVER TO PROMETHEUS.
"BUT THINGS HAVE BEEN MOVING FAR TOO FAST AND UNCHECKED..."
LAB -19
ACCESS GRANTED
BIOHAZAR
OH, NO... NO!
WHO'S IN CHARGE OF THE PROJECT?
TEM BORJGIN.
NEVER HEARD OF HIM. MONGOLIAN...?

CHINESE. DEFECTED TO HONG KONG DECADES AGO, MADE A KILLING PLAYING THE MARKET. ACQUIRED PROMETHEUS A LITTLE OVER A YEAR AGO...
STRONG BACKGROUND IN BIOTECH. IMPECCABLE CREDENTIALS--
YEAH, I BET. THE BEST CREDENTIALS MONEY CAN BUY.
SOME CLOWN NOBODY'S EVER HEARD OF POPS OUT OF MONGOLIA...
...TAKES OVER AN OBSCURE DOMESTIC BIOTECH COMPANY IN THE HEARTLAND...
...SPREADS AROUND ENOUGH CASH TO BUY SUPPORT ON THE HILL AND SCORES A MAJOR DEFENSE DEPARTMENT CONTRACT!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT PICTURE, KOONING?
I--I DON'T... UNDERSTAND--
THEN ALLOW ME TO CLARIFY THINGS FOR YOU, JACK: YOU BUNDLED THE SERVICES OF A BIO-ENGINEERING GENIUS...
...MILLIONS OF TAX-FUNDED DOLLARS...
...AND--JUST FOR GIGGLES--THE EXTREMIS ENHANCILE...
...AND HANDED THEM OVER TO THE MOST NOTORIOUS, MEGALOMANIACAL PSYCHOPATH TO EVER DRAW BREATH AND WALK ON TWO LEGS...
"...THE MANDARIN."
I'M SORRY I HAD TO DECEIVE YOU, CHILD...
...BUT THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY.

I COULDN'T RISK LOSING YOUR COOPERATION. THE STAKES WERE FAR TOO HIGH.
STAKES? WHAT STAKES?
NO LESS THAN THE FUTURE OF MANKIND.
BIOHAZARD
S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER
DUGAN! STARK. DEPLOY TO NEBRASKA, STAT!
KOONING JUST SPILLED HIS GUTS...
AN OMAHA CONTRACTOR, PROMETHEUS GENTECH, IS COVERTLY DEVELOPING A WEAPONIZED VERSION OF EXTREMIS.

THIS IS A PRIORITY-ONE BIOALERT. OPERATE UNDER PROTOCOL BETA-FOUR-SIX-NINER-ZULU. AUTHORIZATION CODE NUMBER FOUR-FOXTROT-SEVEN-SEVEN-ALPHA-ALPHA-GAMMA. COPY?
ROGER THAT. CODE VALIDATED. WHAT ABOUT FRIENDLIES?
THERE ARE NO FRIENDLIES...
...THE ENTIRE OPERATION IS UNDER THE COMMAND OF THE MANDARIN, COPY?
COPY THAT.
LAUNCH ON MY COMMAND. STARK OUT.
READY LAUNCH-COORDINATES FOR THE STARK-TECH EVH-BETA PROTOTYPE.
BELAY THAT ORDER.
JUST WHAT IN THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING, SUB-DIRECTOR DUGAN?
LIKE THIS POOR CREATURE, I WAS IMPRISONED WITHIN MY OWN CORRUPTED FLESH. I SPENT YEARS CONTEMPLATING MY FAILURES...
EVEN THOUGH I POSSESSED UNTOLD POWER, MY DREAMS CRASHED, ONE AFTER ANOTHER, LIKE A RAGING SEA AGAINST A ROCKY SHORE...
WAS I DESTINED TO FAIL? WERE MY ENEMIES SOMEHOW STRONGER OR MORE VIRTUOUS THAN I?
NOTHING MADE SENSE UNTIL I LOOKED BEYOND MYSELF, FAR INTO THE DISTANT PAST...
THERE I FOUND MY EPIPHANY.

"MY GREAT ANCESTOR, GENGHIS KHAN, RULED HIS VAST EMPIRE UNDER A PERFECT SYSTEM OF MERITOCRACY...
"ONE'S STATION IN LIFE WAS NOT PREDICATED ON WEALTH OR FAMILIAL CONNECTIONS...
"RATHER, MUCH LIKE THE DELICATE BALANCE OF NATURE, IT WAS BASED ON MERIT...
"MEN WERE JUDGED BY THEIR INBORN STRENGTH...
"...SPEED...
"...AND RUTHLESS INGENUITY.


"THE STRONG SURVIVED. THE STRONGER RULED."
I REALIZED THAT THIS PERFECT ORDER HAD BEEN SUBVERTED WHEN THE MALUKKIANS GRANTED ME THE POWER OF THE TEN RINGS.
FOR DECADES, I WAS CONVINCED THAT MY DESTINY WAS TO RULE OVER HUMANKIND.
I WAS A FOOL.
IN THEIR COSMIC WISDOM, THE MALUKKIANS HAD MADE ME A LIVING EXAMPLE OF THE NEXT STEP IN THE EVOLUTION OF OUR SPECIES.
MY POWERS WERE GODLIKE, YET I HAD ALWAYS WIELDED THEM WITH THE PETTY RAPACITY OF A MAN.
I REALIZED MY TRUE DESTINY WAS TO RESTORE THE BALANCE. TO ELEVATE, NOT ENSLAVE MANKIND.
"BUT HOW?" I WONDERED. FOR YEARS, THE MEANS ELUDED ME...
ACCESS GRAN
BIOHAZ.
...UNTIL YOU CREATED THE EXTREMIS ENHANCILE.

YOU'RE INSANE...
BILLIONS WILL DIE IF YOU RELEASE EXTREMIS INTO THE ENVIRONMENT.
BUT MILLIONS WILL LIVE. AND HOW THEY'LL LIVE...
STRONGER. SMARTER. ALL BUT IMMUNE TO THE RAVAGES OF AGE AND DISEASE...VIRTUALLY IMMORTAL.
IS THIS NOT WORTH THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE? TO WITNESS THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA, TO LIVE AS A GOD IN A WORLD OF GODS?
HOW I ENVY YOU.
ENVY? W-WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? THAT I--
YES. YOU POSSESS THE RARE GENE SEQUENCE THAT INSURES SURVIVAL OF THE EXTREMIS TRANSFORMATION.
AS FOR ME...
...I WILL DIE WITH THE OTHERS IN THE GREAT CULLING.
UNLIKE YOU, CHILD, I WILL NOT LIVE TO SEE THE FRUITS OF MY LABOR. IT IS A SMALL PRICE TO PAY--
BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

WHA-BOOM!
MANDARIN!
AB-19 AREA 6
LET'S GO.
TO BE CONTINUED...

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CTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D.

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WHEN BILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK DONS SOPHISTICATED STEEL-MESH ARMOR OF HIS OWN DESIGN, HE BECOMES A LIVING HIGH-TECH WEAPON--THE WORLD'S GREATEST HUMAN FIGHTING MACHINE.

THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

PREVIOUSLY...

Recent experiences have left Tony Stark close to madness: he's sequestered himself and sees visions of recently dead friends, who provide clues to his current investigations.

Tony's former colleague and girlfriend, scientist Maya Hansen, is also believed dead. But in fact, she secretly works for the government-sponsored Prometheus Gentech, run by the charismatic Tem Borjigin – who is actually the super-villain Mandarin in disguise. Maya reluctantly gives Tem sensitive information about the lethal Extremis virus, believing it will ultimately serve humanitarian purposes.

Tony and his friend Doctor Leonard Samson confront Secretary of State Jack Kooning about the connection between the government and Prometheus Gentech. But while Kooning orchestrated the company's research, he was unaware the Mandarin was behind it. Tony gets peacekeeping agency S.H.I.E.L.D. on the case.

Maya has also become suspicious, and discovers a lab filled with Extremis-enhanced research subjects. When Tem catches her, he reveals his plan to release Extremis into the populace, giving enhanced abilities to the very few who possess the gene to survive it – and killing everyone else, including himself.

His speech is interrupted when Iron Man bursts in.

HAUNTED

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A BIOLOGICAL ATTACK?!
YES. THE MANDARIN HAS DEVELOPED A WEAPONIZED VERSION OF EXTREMIS--
THE MANDARIN IS DEAD, DUGAN! CAN'T YOU SEE THIS IS ANOTHER ONE OF STARK'S DELUSIONS?
HE'S NOT CRAZY, MARIA. SURE, HE'S A LITTLE ECCENTRIC--
ECCENTRIC? THE MAN IS CURRENTLY ON ENFORCED PSYCHIATRIC LEAVE!
AND ON HIS ORDERS YOU WANT TO PLACE THIS VESSEL INTO AN OFFENSIVE POSITION OVER AN AMERICAN CITY, ON AMERICAN SOIL--
--COMMANDER HILL--
--AND DEPLOY AN EXPERIMENTAL NUCLEAR DEVICE--
--MARIA!
SOME THINGS...ARE NOT...IN THE BOOK!
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
...THE ONE YOU ALWAYS PLAY BY...
THE BOOK THAT SAYS IF YOU TOE THE LINE LONG ENOUGH, YOU EARN ANOTHER STRIPE...
THE BOOK THAT SAYS EVEN IF MEN DIE--HELL, EVEN IF MILLIONS OF INNOCENT CIVILIANS DIE--YOU'RE NOT RESPONSIBLE, AS LONG AS YOU FOLLOWED ORDERS.
JUST LIKE McCLELLAN AT ANTIETAM. JUST LIKE ANTILL AT GALLIPOLI...
BECAUSE I CAN SEE IT IN YOUR EYES...
YOU KNOW STARK IS RIGHT.
AND LIKE McCLELLAN, LIKE ANTILL, THE NEXT COMMAND YOU MAKE WILL BE THE ONE THAT DEFINES YOU.

ALL HANDS, BATTLE-STATIONS!
FULL BURN TO OMAHA!
PROMETHEUS, GENTECH INC., OMAHA, NEBRASKA
REET! REET! REET! REET! REET!
ALL EMPLOYEES EVACUATE THE BUILDING IMMEDIATELY. THIS IS NOT A DRILL!
EVERYONE, PLEASE EXIT AND LEAVE THE CAMPUS IMMEDIATELY. CHECK OUT AT THE GATE AREA!
WHAT'S HAPPENING?!
SOME KIND OF BREACH IN LAB 19.
YOU SURPRISE ME, STARK. YOU USED TO BE SUCH A PRAGMATIST.
NOT TERRIBLY PRUDENT, FACING ME IN OBSOLETE ARMOR.

I WAS EXPECTING YOU TO WAIT UNTIL YOU'D BEEN CLEARED BY SAMSON AND HAD THE EXTREMIS-INHIBITING ANKLET REMOVED.
SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU.
STEP AWAY FROM HIM, MAYA...
TONY, YOU'VE GOT TO BELIEVE ME, I DIDN'T KNOW--
JUST... STEP... AWAY.
YOU SHOULD LISTEN TO HIM, DEAR.
ABSURD AS IT MAY SEEM...
...I THINK HE'S SERIOUS.
WHAAA-BOOOM!

HRAAAH!
FIRE
ALARM
AAAAAP!

AHHHHHRRRR!
ZZZZZZT SSHHH!
GAH!
WHOMMP!

S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER.
EN ROUTE TO NEBRASKA.
TEAM ALPHA BRIEFING ROOM.
THIS IS THE SITUATION...
WE ARE FACING A FULL-SCALE BIOLOGICAL THREAT IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA. POTENTIAL CASUALTIES, ALMOST HALF A MILLION.
DIRECTOR STARK IS ON THE GROUND AS WE SPEAK.
BY HIS DIRECT ORDERS, IF HE IS UNABLE TO CONTAIN THE SITUATION, WE WILL DEPLOY THE STARK-TECH EVH BETA PROTOTYPE WARHEAD.
EVH WHAT?
GAFFER...?
THE STARK-TECH MARK 332.4 EVENT HORIZON DEVICE...
THIS WEAPON WAS DESIGNED BY DIRECTOR STARK AS A COUNTERMEASURE FOR BIOTHREATS WITHIN--OR IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO--LARGE POPULATION CENTERS.
ESSENTIALLY, THE EVH IS A FIVE HUNDRED KILOTON GROSS YIELD NUCLEAR DEVICE...
ITS BLAST WAVE IS SHIELDED BY A FULLY PROGRAMMABLE, OPPOSING GRAVITATIONAL FIELD POWERED BY THE INTERIOR FISSION OF THE DEVICE.
ONCE THE BLAST ZONE EXPANDS TO A PREPROGRAMMED POINT OF STASIS, THE IMPLODING GRAVITATIONAL ENVELOPE EXCEEDS THE EXPANDING FORCE OF THE EXPLOSION...
IT THEN COLLAPSES, GENERATING A MICRO-BLACK HOLE ANALOG THE SIZE OF ONE HUNDRED PROTONS.
EVERYTHING--ALL ORGANIC AND INORGANIC MATTER WITHIN THE BLAST ZONE--IS DRAWN INTO THIS BLACK HOLE.
JEEZ. THEN WHAT?
THE ANALOG DISPERSES INTO A HARMLESS BURST OF HAWKING RADIATION.

CLEAN AS A BEAN. NO RADIATION, NO FALLOUT.
IF WE DEPLOY THE WEAPON, I WANT YOU BOYS ON THE GROUND AS SOON AS THE LIGHT SHOW IS OVER.
ANY QUESTIONS?
AMERICAN RESPONSE?
WE'LL BURN THAT BRIDGE WHEN WE COME TO IT, SOLDIER.
K-KRASHH

HE WAS RIGHT. SHOULD'VE WAITED FOR THE EXTREMIS ARMOR...CAN BARELY REMEMBER THIS TIN CAN'S SPECS.
DISPLAY WEAPON SYSTEM...
LIST... UNIBEAM PALM REPULSORS SONIC EMITTER...
EEEEEEEEE!!!!!!!!...!
THAT'LL WORK...
SAY CHEESE.

LIQUID NITROGEN
STAND CLEAR

HUP!

ZARD

GAAAHHHHHHH!
CHA KRA
CAN'T LET HIM GET AWAY!

NO! BLACK LIGHT...
TONY! STOP HIM, HE'S GOING TO--
UHN...
SWAK!
GOODBYE, STARK. PLAY NICE WITH YOUR SIBLINGS...

SIBLINGS...?
CHK!
WHAT...?
DAMN...

DUGAN! WHAT IS YOUR LOCATION!
APPROACHING TARGET, LOCKED AND LOADED, DIRECTOR STARK.
HILL?! HAVE YOU BEEN BRIEFED?
FULLY, SIR. WE'RE STANDING BY FOR YOUR ORDER...
STATUS?
I HAVE OVER TWENTY EXTREMIS-AUGMENTED COMBATANTS DOING THEIR BEST TO TAKE ME APART...
IF THEY ESCAPE THIS FACILITY, THEY'LL BE UNSTOPPABLE.
I ALSO HAVE AN INDETERMINATE AMOUNT OF AIRBORNE EXTREMIS ENHANCILE THAT COULD BE RELEASED INTO THE ENVIRONMENT AT ANY MOMENT.
ORDERS?

DEPLOY THE EVH IMMEDIATELY. TAKE OUT PROMETHEUS. ACTIVATING BEACON ON MY LOCATION.
SIR--
NOW, COMMANDER.
STARK, OUT.
I COULD THROW YOU IN THE BRIG, CALL IT A MUTINY, TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY...
NOT ON YOUR LIFE.
ON MY MARK. PROTOCOL BETA-FOUR-SIXNINER-ZULU. AUTHORIZATION CODE NUMBER FOUR-FOXTROT-SEVEN-SEVEN-ALPHA-ALPHA-GAMMA.
LAUNCH THE EVH ON DIRECTOR STARK'S BEACON, AND...
...MARK!
SWAP _ TAT_TGP _
ZB 884
8461.01
624_21
00 27 53
PA 004
SWAP _ TAT_TGP _
ZB 884
8461.01
624_21
00 13 80
PA 004

WHA-BOOOOM!
WOW.
AB-19

LAB-19

GOTTA GO...

HMPH!
SYSTEM... REROUTE ALL... POWER TO PROPULSION UNITS...
WARNING! ARMOR-SYSTEM STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY DETERIORATING...
TOTAL TIME ESTIMATED TO CATASTROPHIC FAILURE: FIVE SECONDS...
...FOUR SECONDS...
...THRE3E SE-CON77DS...

...TWO SEC0001000111100N01--
EVH STAGE THREE EFFECT TERMINATED. HAWKING RADIATION NEGLIGIBLE...
TARGET AREA SAFE FOR PERSONNEL DEPLOYMENT.
DIRECTOR STARK, RESPOND. WHAT IS YOUR STATUS?
DIRECTOR STARK, RESPOND, PLEASE...
GAFFER, SCAN GROUND ZERO FOR LIFE SIGNS.
NEGATIVE... CHECKING INFRARED...
NEGATIVE... THERE'S NOTHING ALIVE WITHIN THE EVENT PERIMETER.
TO BE CONTINUED...

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OMAHA, NEBRASKA
AM I DEAD...?
NO, DOCTOR STARK. YOU ARE NOT DEAD.
TOO BAD...
YOU HAVE A TERRIBLE ATTITUDE, SON. YOU MUST LET GO OF YOUR HATRED.
HO YINSEN AND SON...TERRIFIC... NOW I'M BEING DOUBLE-TEAMED BY MY OWN SUBCONSCIOUS...
HOW CAN YOU HARBOR ILL WILL ON SUCH A LOVELY DAY?
I KNOW, DAD. I'M TRYING...
MAYBE I SHOULD TAKE A CUE FROM STARK. JUST KICK BACK AND CHILL, TRY TO FIND SHAPES IN THE CLOUDS...
SHAPES...?
YES, DOCTOR STARK. A CHILD'S GAME OF PATTERN RECOGNITION. THIS IS A FINE WAY TO OCCUPY THE IDLE MIND.
SEE? THE CLOUDS ARE GATHERING IN THE EAST. LOOKS LIKE RAIN.
YES, SON...
...SOON.
WHAT THE HELL...?
DIRECTOR STARK...?

DIRECTOR STARK, THIS IS HILL. PLEASE RESPOND.

WHEN BILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK DONS SOPHISTICATED STEEL-MESH ARMOR OF HIS OWN DESIGN, HE BECOMES A LIVING HIGH-TECH WEAPON--THE WORLD'S GREATEST HUMAN FIGHTING MACHINE.

THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

PREVIOUSLY...

The Mandarin has revealed plans to release the Extremis virus into the population, giving enhanced abilities to a few with a specific genetic makeup, but killing the rest--including himself.

With the Mandarin and Iron Man locked in battle, Tony Stark's allies from peacekeeping agency S.H.I.E.L.D. decide to assist him without authorization. On the way, they devise a plan to detonate Stark's own EVH weapon: A device that can counteract the Extremis attack by drawing everything around it into a mini-black hole, then dispersing it in a burst.

When Iron Man is attacked by Extremis-enhanced experiment subjects, he orders S.H.I.E.L.D. to detonate the EVH. Though he tries to escape the blast, the effects are devastating.

S.H.I.E.L.D. tries to contact him, but detects no signs of life.

HAUNTED

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STARK. RESPOND, DAMMIT...
HE HAD TO MAKE IT.
STARK, THIS IS HILL. IF YOU CAN READ ME--
THIS IS STARK, OVER...
WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?!
NOT SURE. I WAS KICKING FULL-BURN AGAINST THE EVH GRAVITATIONAL PULL...
WHEN IT COLLAPSED, IT MUST'VE SLUNGSHOT ME... I DUNNO, THREE MILES FROM GROUND ZERO, AT LEAST.
COMMANDER HILL...?
...WE HAVE INCOMING.
S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER. THIS IS FOXTROT-NINER...

HERE IT COMES...
BY ORDER OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES YOU ARE TO GROUND YOUR AIRCRAFT AT OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE IMMEDIATELY OR WE ARE AUTHORIZED TO ENGAGE.
DIRECTOR STARK, EXTRACTION MAY BE A BIT OF A PROBLEM...
...SEEMS WE'VE PICKED UP SOME ESCORTS.
ROGER THAT.

UHHHNNN...
WHAT HAPPENED? WHERE AM I?
THE S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER. NATIONAL GUARD FOUND YOU UNCONSCIOUS IN A FIELD A FEW MILES OUT.
WE'RE IN DEEP, MAYA.
THE UNITED NATIONS HAS ORDERED US BACK TO NEW YORK UNDER MILITARY ESCORT.
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IS GOING TO TRY ME AND MY OFFICERS ON CHARGES OF TERRORISM.
TERRORISM?!
WE WERE FORCED TO DEPLOY AN ATOMIC DEVICE TO TAKE OUT PROMETHEUS.
BUT... HOW DID I--
--GET OUT ALIVE?
I GUESS THE MANDARIN HAS A SOFT SPOT FOR PRETTY GIRLS.
THE MANDARIN!
ALIAS TEM BORJIGIN, YEAH. MY PEOPLE BELIEVE HE'S SUCCEEDED IN WEAPONIZING EXTREMIS.

BUT...THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. I BUILT IN SAFEGUARDS--
--PROGRAMMED CELL DEATH, I KNOW. WE HAVE TO ASSUME HE'S DEFEATED IT.
ON WHAT BASIS?
IF HE HADN'T, YOU WOULDN'T BE SITTING HERE.
HE OBVIOUSLY HAD NO FURTHER USE FOR YOU.
FRANKLY, I'M SURPRISED YOU'RE STILL ALIVE. THE OLD MAN'S GETTING SLOPPY...
MY GOD, TONY. I HAD NO IDEA...
NONE OF US DID UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE. HE PLAYED EVERYONE. EVEN KOONING.
ESPECIALLY KOONING...
BUT THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT NOW.
WE'VE ONLY GOT ONE CHANCE TO TURN THIS THING AROUND, AND YOU'RE THE KEY, MAYA.
WE NEED YOU TO GIVE US THE FULL GENETIC ENCODING SEQUENCE FOR YOUR AIRBORNE EXTREMIS.
UNLOCK IT? WHY?
IT'S THE ONLY WAY WE CAN DEVELOP A COUNTERMEASURE. IS A VACCINATION POSSIBLE?
YES, BUT...
...I CAN'T, TONY.

CAN'T...?
I WON'T. NOT WITHOUT HARD EVIDENCE THAT TEM HAS DEFEATED MY SAFEGUARDS.
I AM NOT GOING TO OPEN THE ARCHITECTURE FOR ANYONE UNLESS IT'S ABSOLUTELY A LAST RESORT.
BUT--
NO, TONY. IT'S TOO DANGEROUS. YOU KNOW THAT BETTER THAN ANYONE.
TIME'S SHORT, MAYA. CERTAINTY IS A LUXURY WE CANNOT AFFORD.
IF I'M RIGHT, AND HE'S BROKEN THE CODE, IT WILL COST LITERALLY BILLIONS OF LIVES.
I KNOW THAT...
...BUT IF YOU'RE WRONG, YOU'RE ASKING ME TO OPEN PANDORA'S BOX.
ONCE I REVEAL THE SPECIFICATIONS FOR AN AIRBORNE VERSION OF EXTREMIS, THERE'S NO GOING BACK.
EVENTUALLY, IT'LL FALL INTO THE WRONG HANDS, AND WE'LL BE FACING THIS NIGHTMARE AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN...
NO, TONY. CERTAINTY IS NOT A LUXURY. NOT WHEN IT COMES TO THIS.
I'M NOT GOING TO ALLOW MYSELF TO BE USED AGAIN. I NEED PROOF. OTHERWISE...
...EXTREMIS DIES WITH ME.

NEW YORK HARBOR
DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D., ANTHONY STARK, ALSO KNOWN AS THE SUPER HERO, IRON MAN, IS BEING HELD UNDER HEAVILY GUARDED HOUSE ARREST ABOARD THE S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER.
THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, IN A JOINT SESSION WITH THE U.S. COMMISSION ON SUPERHUMAN ACTIVITIES, IS CURRENTLY HEARING TESTIMONY.
ON MONDAY, S.H.I.E.L.D., UNDER STANDING ORDERS BY DIRECTOR STARK, DEPLOYED AN EXPERIMENTAL WEAPON, DESCRIBED BY SOME AS A "CLEAN NUKE," DESTROYING AN INDUSTRIAL FACILITY TWO MILES OUTSIDE OMAHA, NEBRASKA.
S.H.I.E.L.D. HEARINGS BEGIN TODAY
AUTHORITIES SAY THE AREA WAS EVACUATED PRIOR TO THE BLAST AND THERE WERE NO CASUALTIES REPORTED.
THOUGH A SPOKESMAN FOR THE NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION HAS VERIFIED THAT THERE IS NO RESIDUAL RADIATION, LOCALS ARE SKEPTICAL.
, NEBRASKA
DUBBED, "THE TRIAL OF THE MILLENNIUM," THE UNITED NATIONS WILL DECIDE THE FATE OF STARK AND HIGH-RANKING MEMBERS OF HIS STAFF--
I GUESS THAT MEANS US.
SHIELD
YOU GOTTA WONDER WHAT'S GOT THEIR UNDERWEAR IN A BUNCH. YOU'D THINK WE'D DROPPED A W.M.D. ON AMERICAN SOIL OR SOMETHING...
WHAT'S THE PLAN, SIR?
FIRST, WE NEED TO KNOW WHETHER THE MANDARIN HAS DEFEATED MAYA'S SAFEGUARDS.
USE OUR CONTRACT AGENTS TO TRACK DOWN ANY KEY PROMETHEUS EMPLOYEES. I WANT TO KNOW IF THE WEAPON'S HOT.
THEY'RE ALREADY ON IT.

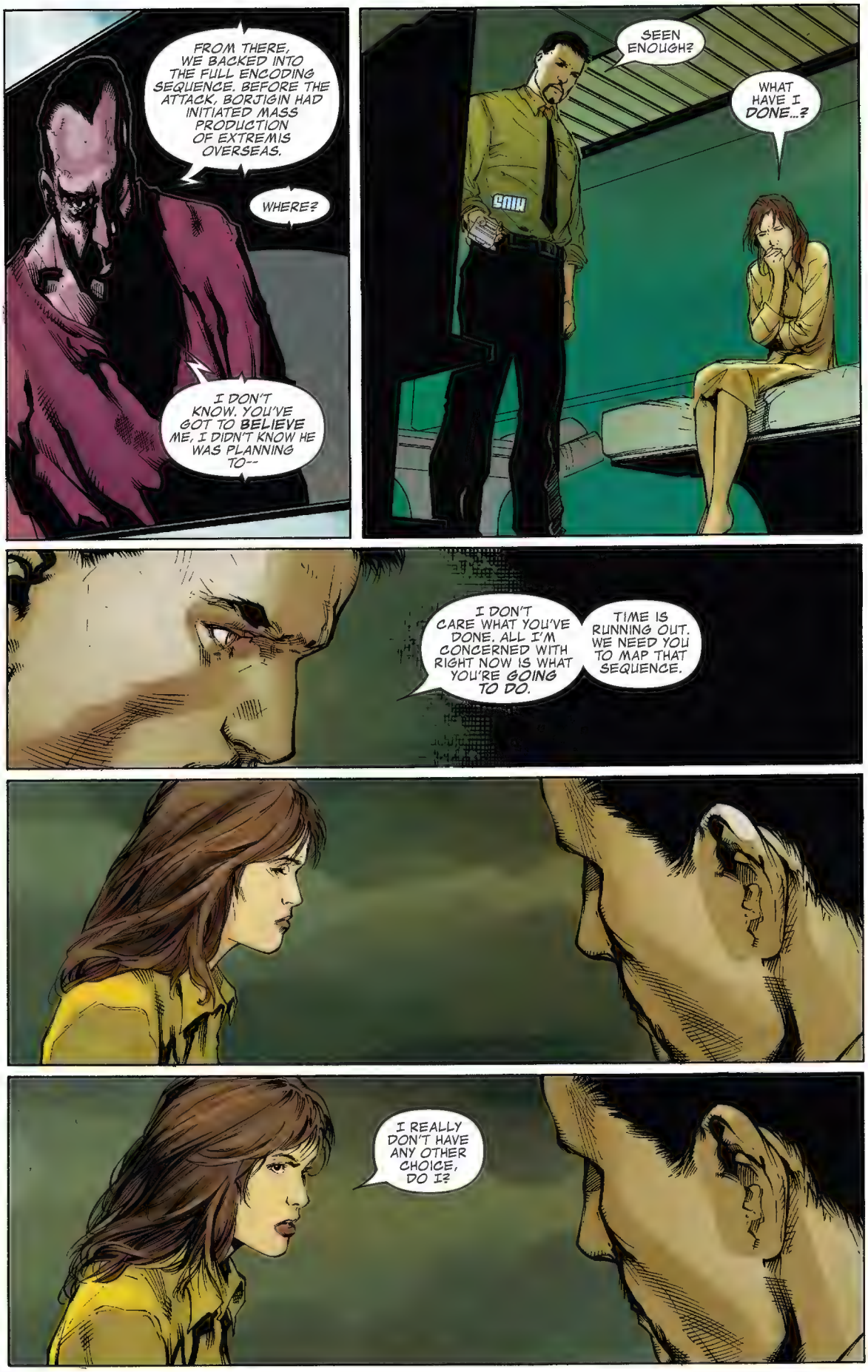
MARIA, I NEED EVERYTHING ON TEM BORJIGIN. FOLLOW THE MONEY. EVERY BUSINESS INTEREST, EVERY COMPANY, EVERY SHARE OF STOCK...
IF THE GUY OWNS A FROZEN BANANA STAND IN BALI, I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT IT.
TIMOTHY, MY MAN, YOU WALK POINT ON THE TRIBUNAL.
GATHER AND COLLATE INTELLIGENCE, PASS IT ALONG TO OUR LEGAL TEAM. I ASSUME YOU'VE GOT SOME PULL WITH MEMBERS ON THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY?
YOU KIDDING? THERE'S SKELETONS IN THOSE BOYS' CLOSETS THAT STILL HAVE MEAT ON THEM.
GOOD. I WANT TO STICK A FORK IN THIS DEAL A.S.A.P. AND GET BACK TO WORK. FIGHT DIRTY IF YOU HAVE TO.
HOW DIRTY?
NICK FURY
DIRTY. I DON'T THINK I NEED TO REMIND YOU TWO THAT WE WON'T BE MUCH HELP BEHIND BARS.
QUESTIONS...?
NEW YORK
DOCTOR SAMSON, YOU CLAIM A VAST "EXTREMIS CONSPIRACY" AIDED AND ABETTED BY HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS IN THE U.S. GOVERNMENT...
DISMISSED.

H. P. GYRICH
AND YET, OTHER THAN INFORMATION GIVEN TO YOU BY DIRECTOR STARK, YOU OFFER NO SOLID EVIDENCE THAT SUCH A CONSPIRACY INDEED EXISTS.
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, SECRETARY GYRICH, THAT IS NOT A FAIR CHARACTERIZATION OF MY TESTIMONY.
DID YOU NOT PLACE DIRECTOR STARK ON MANDATED PSYCHIATRIC LEAVE?
YES, BUT--
DR. LEONARD SAMSON
AND YET YOU TRUST THIS MAN?! A MAN YOU YOURSELF FOUND PSYCHOLOGICALLY UNFIT FOR COMMAND?
THERE IS NOTHING IN MY ASSESSMENT THAT INDICATES THAT TONY STARK IS UNFIT FOR COMMAND, DIRECTOR OSBORN.
HE IS AS SANE AND RATIONAL AS ANY MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION. INDEED, MORE SO THAN SOME.
WHAT EXACTLY ARE YOU IMPLYING, SIR?!
ORDER! ORDER...!
MADAME CHAIRWOMAN, I MOVE TO STRIKE THE LAST COMMENT MADE BY THE WITNESS FROM THE RECORD!

DOCTOR SAMSON, PLEASE, JUST ANSWER THE QUESTIONS WITH AS LITTLE PERSONAL ANIMUS AS POSSIBLE.
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, MADAME CHAIRWOMAN, I HAVE BEEN DOING SO FOR THE PAST FIVE-AND-A-HALF HOURS.
BUT WE ARE WASTING PRECIOUS TIME...
DIRECTOR STARK WAS FORCED TO DESTROY PROMETHEUS IN ORDER TO AVERT A POSSIBLE PANDEMIC WITH A FATALITY RATE OF 97.5%.
THE MANDARIN IS CURRENTLY AT LARGE AND IN POSSESSION OF A WEAPONIZED VERSION OF EXTREMIS.
EVERY MOMENT WE SPEND *TALKING ABOUT IT* IS ANOTHER MOMENT HE HAS TO PREPARE ITS DEPLOYMENT.
SURELY, DOCTOR SAMSON, YOU AREN'T SUGGESTING THAT WE SUSPEND THESE PROCEEDINGS.
VALERIE COOPER
B. LETENDRE
H.P. GYRICH
THAT'S *EXACTLY* WHAT I'M SUGGESTING.
I'M AFRAID THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE...
EITHER THAT, OR *IMMEDIATELY* SUBPOENA SECRETARY OF DEFENSE JACK KOONING IN ORDER TO CORROBORATE MY TESTIMONY SO WE CAN *TAKE ACTION.*
...SECRETARY KOONING HAS VANISHED.
HE'S BEEN MISSING SINCE YOU AND DIRECTOR STARK INTERROGATED HIM AT HIS D.C. TOWNHOUSE.
WHICH RAISES *ANOTHER* NAGGING QUESTION, GIVEN THAT YOU AND STARK WERE THE LAST PEOPLE TO SEE HIM *ALIVE*...
"...WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE HAPPENED TO JACK KOONING?"
KACHIN STATE INTERIOR, MYANMAR

DAMMIT...
CH-CHACK!
FEEP
FEEP
FEEEE-EE

DOCTOR HANSEN'S METHODS WERE INGENIOUS, BUT EVENTUALLY WE MANAGED TO CRACK THE SAFEGUARDS SHE'D DEVELOPED FOR EXTREMIS...
SHEARING...
YEAH. THE MANDARIN'S LEAD GENETICIST. HE WAS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY AN HOUR AGO.


FROM THERE, WE BACKED INTO THE FULL ENCODING SEQUENCE. BEFORE THE ATTACK, BORJIGIN HAD INITIATED MASS PRODUCTION OF EXTREMIS OVERSEAS.
WHERE?
I DON'T KNOW. YOU'VE GOT TO BELIEVE ME, I DIDN'T KNOW HE WAS PLANNING TO--
SEEN ENOUGH?
WHAT HAVE I DONE...?
I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU'VE DONE. ALL I'M CONCERNED WITH RIGHT NOW IS WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO DO.
TIME IS RUNNING OUT. WE NEED YOU TO MAP THAT SEQUENCE.
I REALLY DON'T HAVE ANY OTHER CHOICE, DO I?

PERHAPS YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN, MISTER DUGAN, BUT LESS THAN SIX MONTHS AGO, YOUR DIRECTOR STARK CARRIED OUT AN ILLEGAL INCURSION INTO CHINA AND RAIDED ONE OF OUR MENTAL HEALTH FACILITIES...
WE WERE CONDUCTING AN EMERGENCY RESCUE OPERATION--
AN OPERATION THAT PROVED TO BE LESS THAN SUCCESSFUL--
--YET YIELDED THE FIRST HARD EVIDENCE THAT THE MANDARIN WAS STILL ALIVE AND BEING HELD IN YOUR GOVERNMENT'S CUSTODY.
I WOULD HARDLY CALL THE GRAFFITI OF A DISEASED MIND "HARD EVIDENCE."
LISTEN, JIANG. WE ALREADY KNOW THAT THE BULK OF THE MANDARIN'S FACTORIES ARE LOCATED IN CHINA--
IF YOU ARE REFERRING TO THE MAN WE KNOW AS TEM BORTJIGIN, THAT IS TRUE.
SO IT STANDS TO REASON THAT IF HE'S RAMPING UP PRODUCTION OF EXTREMIS, IT'S GONNA BE IN YOUR BACKYARD.
MISTER DUGAN, MY GOVERNMENT IS HOSTING THE OLYMPICS THIS SUMMER.
WHAT THE HELL DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH ANYTHING?
AND WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE WOULD HAPPEN TO YOU IF YOUR GOVERNMENT WAS INFORMED YOU WERE A PAID S.H.I.E.L.D. MOLE FOR OVER A DECADE?
I WOULD BE STRIPPED OF MY POST, PERHAPS IMPRISONED...
...WHICH, I ASSURE YOU, WOULD BE FAR PREFERABLE TO THE FATE THAT WOULD AWAIT ME IF I WAS TO SPOIL OUR OLYMPIAD.
WE HAVE A SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT IN ITS SUCCESS--MASSIVE PUBLIC WORKS, FROM WEATHER MODIFICATION TO DAMMING RIVERS TO MODERNIZING OUR FACTORIES TO REDUCE POLLUTION.
WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE THE EFFECT WOULD BE ON INTERNATIONAL ATTENDANCE IF THE PUBLIC WAS LED TO BELIEVE WE WERE HARBORING A MADMAN DEVELOPING A LETHAL PATHOGEN?
PLEASE SEND IN MISTER DUGAN'S MINDERS TO ESCORT HIM BACK TO THE HELICARRIER.

ANY LUCK?
NONE SO FAR. LOOKS LIKE THE FIX IS IN...
STARK'S CIRCLING THE DRAIN AND THE COCKROACHES ARE SCURRYING TO KEEP FROM GETTING SUCKED DOWN WITH HIM.
ANY WORD ON JACK KOONING'S WHEREABOUTS?
NOTHING. ESCAPE ARTIST...
"...THE GUY JUST FELL COMPLETELY OFF THE GRID."
"WOLFMAN" JACK KOONING...
YOU OWE ME AN EYE.

DAMN GOOD TO SEE YOU, LIEUTENANT.
YOU STILL FAVOR THAT HIGHLAND ROTGUT?
YOU TALK. I'LL POUR.
HEARD ABOUT YOUR TROUBLES.
YEAH. I GOT PLAYED GOOD.
SO, YOU LOOKING TO DISAPPEAR FOR GOOD? I KNOW A GREAT PLASTIC SURGEON IN RIO. TWENTY-FIVE GRAND, YOU'LL BE A RINGER FOR DENZEL.
TEMPTING OFFER, XANG. BUT I THINK I'M GONNA STAND UP AND FACE THE MUSIC ON THIS ONE.
SO WHAT THE HELL'RE YOU DOING *HERE?*
I GOTTA MAKE THINGS RIGHT, FIRST. IT'S MY MESS. I AIM TO CLEAN IT UP...
...JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS.

WHAT I NEED FROM YOU IS INTEL. PUT YOUR EAR HARD TO THE GROUND, FLOG YOUR CONTACTS AND LOCATE THE MARK.
ONCE WE KNOW WHERE HE IS, I'M GONNA NEED AN EXPERIENCED SPOTTER AND A SQUAD OF YOUR FIVE BEST MEN TO BACK ME UP.
DONE. WHO'S THE DEAD MAN?
A CHINESE BUSINESSMAN. GOES BY THE NAME OF TE'M BORJIGIN...
...YOU MIGHT KNOW HIM BETTER AS THE MANDARIN.
THIS IS EVERYTHING?
YEAH.
NICE WORK. BURN A DISK. I'LL WALK IT UP TO THE LAB.
THANK YOU, CHILD.

NEI MONGGOL PROVINCE, CHINA
AN HU PO STATE PSYCHIATRIC FACILITY
HOW DID YOU...?
MENTAL MANIPULATION. FORGIVE ME...
I ONLY HOPE THAT SOMEDAY YOU WILL UNDERSTAND THE SACRIFICE I HAVE MADE FOR THE FUTURE OF MANKIND.
I'M PLEASED TO SAY MY WORK HERE IS DONE, EDMUND.
YOU CRACKED THE SEQUENCE?
YES. I WILL BE UPLOADING THE REVISED MAPPING IMMEDIATELY. ARE THE REST OF THE PREPARATIONS ON TRACK?
I-CLIME LABS, INC. HOPEH PROVINCE CHINA
YES. I JUST GOT OFF THE PHONE WITH THE MINISTER.
AND THE MISSILES?
WE'VE TAKEN OUR FIRST DELIVERY OF DECOMMISSIONED SA-N-7 GADFLIES...

...THEY SHOULD BE MORE THAN ADEQUATE FOR OUR PROJECTED PAYLOAD.
TO BE CONTINUED...

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WHEN BILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK DONS SOPHISTICATED STEEL-MESH ARMOR OF HIS OWN DESIGN, HE BECOMES A LIVING HIGH-TECH WEAPON--THE WORLD'S GREATEST HUMAN FIGHTING MACHINE.

THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

PREVIOUSLY...

The Mandarin has revealed plans to release the Extremis virus into the population, giving enhanced abilities to a few with a specific genetic makeup, but killing the rest--including himself.

After thwarting the Mandarin's attempt to launch an outbreak in Nebraska, Tony and his S.H.I.E.L.D. colleagues are put on trial before the U.N. All the while, S.H.I.E.L.D. struggles to figure out the Mandarin's next move. Unbeknownst to them, the Mandarin has disguised himself as Tony Stark in order to convince scientist Maya Hansen to reveal secrets that will allow him to release Extremis. Maya is devastated to discover what she's done.

Meanwhile, Secretary of Defense Jack Kooning has disappeared to Myanmar, where he meets with Xang, an acquaintance from his past. Kooning asks Xang to help him eliminate the Mandarin while remaining under the authorities' radar.

HAUNTED

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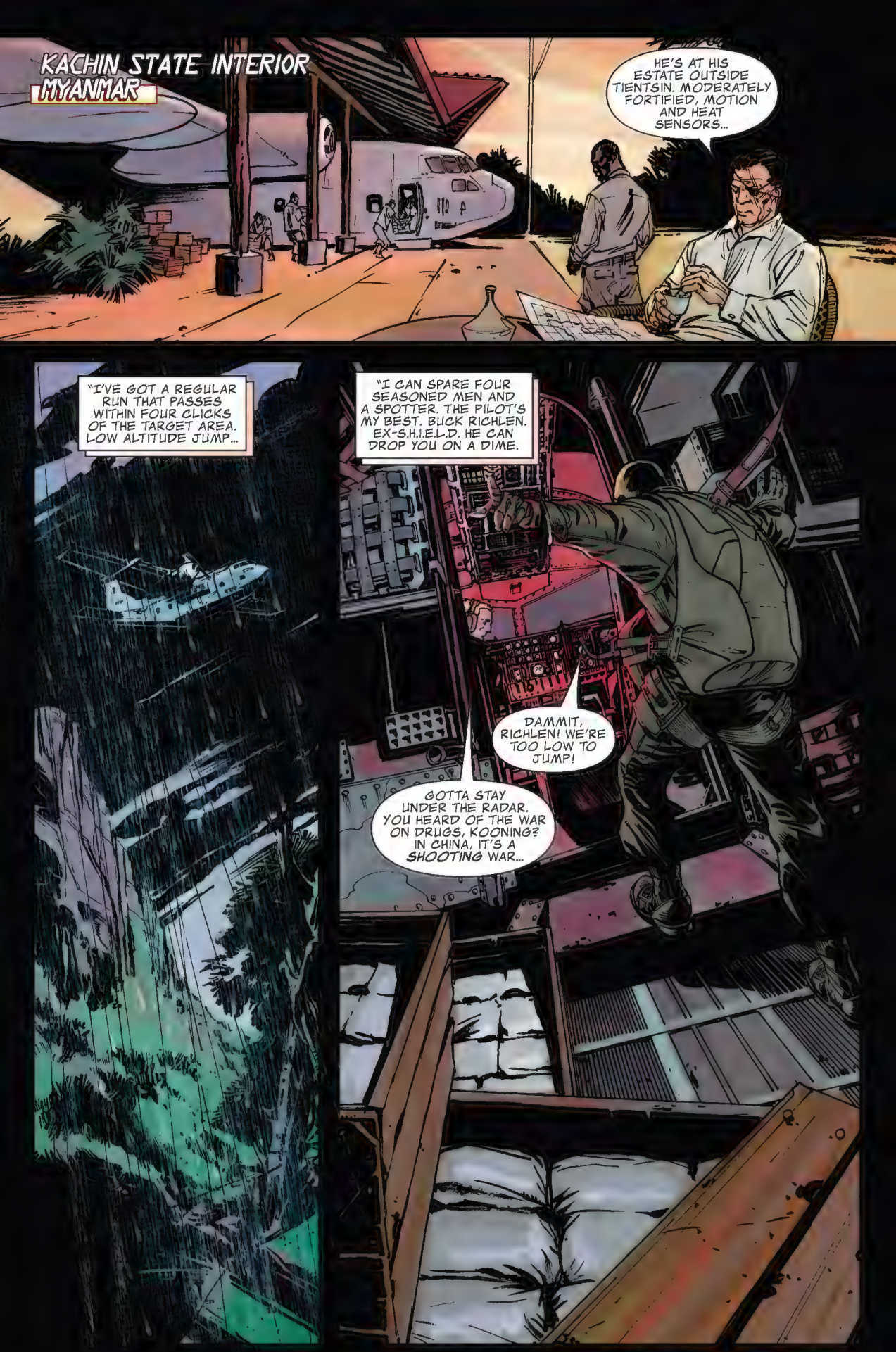

KACHIN STATE INTERIOR
MYANMAR
HE'S AT HIS ESTATE OUTSIDE TIENTSIN. MODERATELY FORTIFIED, MOTION AND HEAT SENSORS...
"I'VE GOT A REGULAR RUN THAT PASSES WITHIN FOUR CLICKS OF THE TARGET AREA. LOW ALTITUDE JUMP...
"I CAN SPARE FOUR SEASONED MEN AND A SPOTTER. THE PILOT'S MY BEST. BUCK RICHLEN. EX-S.H.I.E.L.D. HE CAN DROP YOU ON A DIME.
DAMMIT, RICHLEN! WE'RE TOO LOW TO JUMP!
GOTTA STAY UNDER THE RADAR. YOU HEARD OF THE WAR ON DRUGS, KOONING? IN CHINA, IT'S A SHOOTING WAR...

I'LL GRAB SOME ALTITUDE AS SOON AS WE GET TO THE JUMP-ZONE, WHICH SHOULD BE IN-- OH, HEY...
THIRTY SECONDS!
"I'D WISH YOU LUCK, WOLFMAN JACK KOONING. AS THE PROVERBS SAY...
"...EVEN A FOOL HAS ONE TALENT."

THE UNITED NATIONS BUILDING
STARK IS A WAR CRIMINAL
DIRECTOR STARK, DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO ADD TO THE RECORD BEFORE WE CONCLUDE THESE HEARINGS?
I DO, MISTER SECRETARY...
MY OFFICERS AND I HAVE TESTIFIED UNDER OATH THAT THE MANDARIN IS IN POSSESSION OF A SELF-REPLICATING AIRBORNE VERSION OF EXTREMIS...
...THE DEPLOYMENT OF WHICH WILL TRIGGER A PANDEMIC WITH A 97.5 PERCENT FATALITY RATE.
WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT AN INVESTIGATION WILL EVENTUALLY BEAR OUT OUR ALLEGATIONS. BUT INVESTIGATIONS TAKE TIME...
...TIME WHICH WE DO NOT HAVE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

AS YOU KNOW, I HAVE ALWAYS SUPPORTED THE SUPERHUMAN INITIATIVE. SOME HAVE CALLED ME ITS ARCHITECT.
CAPTAIN AMERICA FOUGHT AND DIED BECAUSE HE WAS CONVINCED THAT REGISTRATION WOULD STRANGLE SUPER HEROES IN RED TAPE AND STRIP US OF THE AUTONOMY WE NEED TO DO OUR JOBS.
I ONLY ASK ONE THING OF THIS COMMITTEE...
"...THAT YOU WILL HAVE THE WISDOM AND COURAGE TO PROVE HIM WRONG."
RANGE...?
TIENTSEN, CHINA
TEM BORJIGIN'S COUNTRY ESTATE
TWO-HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-EIGHT METERS.
WIND...?
GUSTS. SOUTH-SOUTHWEST. FOUR KILOMETERS AN HOUR. HOLD ON...

STEADY...
STEADY...
KRRRRRRRRACK!
THE HELL...?

SPOTTER...
SPOTTER!
WHERE THE HELL IS MY TARGET?

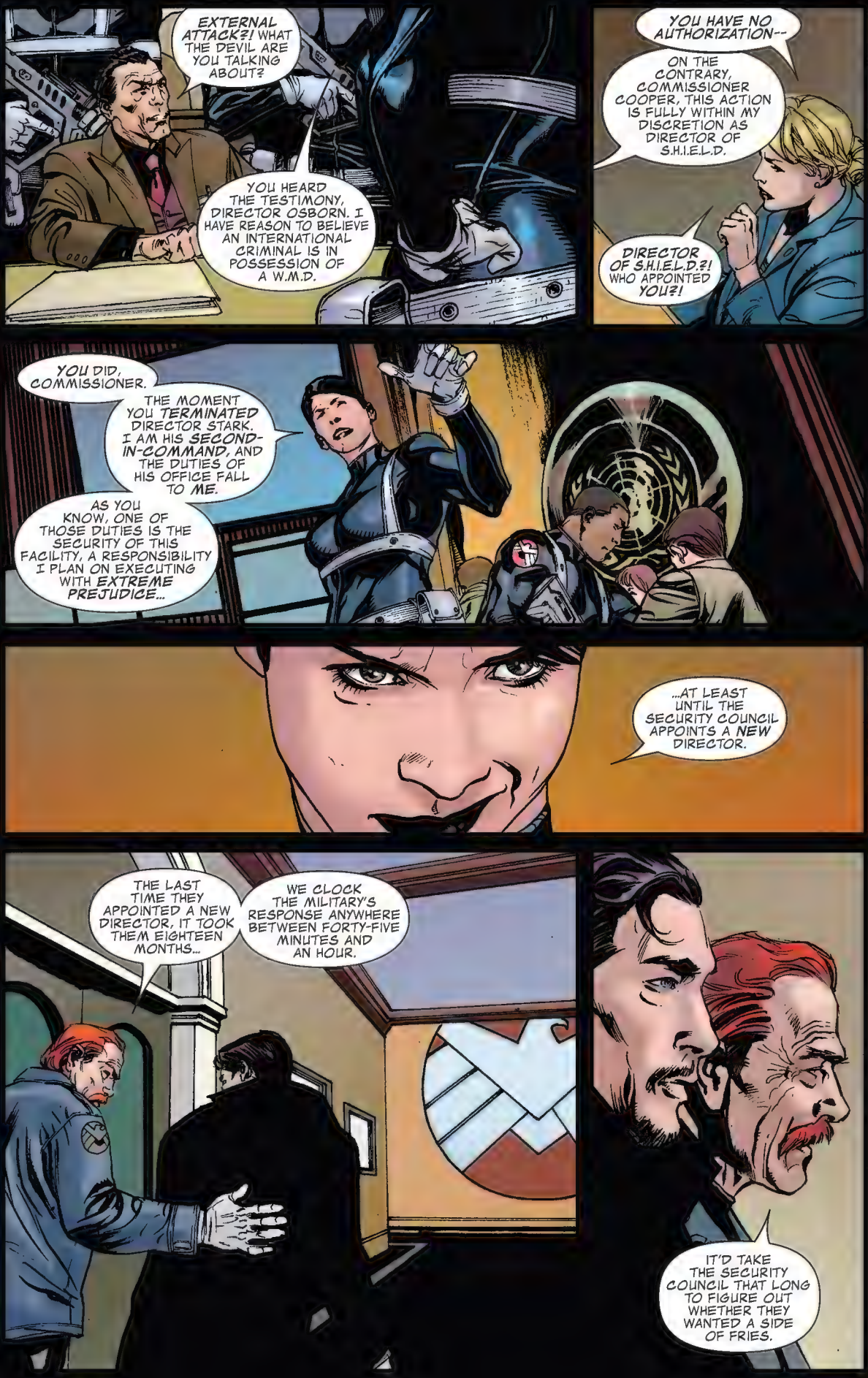
AREN'T WE A LITTLE OLD TO BE PLAYING ARMY, SECRETARY KOONING?
BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM

KRAK!
NO...
NO...
GAAAAAAHHHHH...
NOOOOOOO

S.H.I.E.L.D.
HELICARRIER
GLOBALLY, THE MANDARIN CONTROLS OVER SEVEN HUNDRED VARIOUS COMPANIES...
AND IN CHINA?
JUST UNDER FOUR HUNDRED. BUT HE COULD BE ANYWHERE. WHY CHINA?
HE ENGINEERED THE AMBUSH AT AN HU PO SPECIFICALLY TO CAUSE AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT...
...AND BAR S.H.I.E.L.D. FROM ANY FURTHER INCURSIONS. CLEVER BOY.
IT'S THE ONE PLACE HE'S BEYOND OUR REACH.
WE'VE GOT TO NARROW DOWN THESE NUMBERS. DIAL IN ON MANUFACTURING AND R&D--
BEEPBEEP!
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY?
YEAH. WE'RE DUE ON THE FLOOR. THEY'RE READY TO ANNOUNCE THEIR FINDINGS.

IN A HISTORIC JOINT SESSION, THE COMMISSION ON SUPERHUMAN ACTIVITIES AND THE UNITED NATIONS HAVE CONCLUDED THEIR DELIBERATIONS...
...THEIR FINDINGS WILL DETERMINE WHETHER ANTHONY STARK WILL BE VINDICATED...
"...OR TURNED OVER TO THE CUSTODY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT UNDER CHARGES OF VIOLATING ARTICLE 51 OF THE U.N. CHARTER."
DIRECTOR STARK, DO YOU WISH TO MAKE A STATEMENT BEFORE WE PROCEED WITH OUR FINDINGS IN THIS MATTER?
I BELIEVE I'VE SAID EVERYTHING I HAVE TO SAY, COMMISSIONER.
VERY WELL...
IT IS OUR FINDINGS THAT THERE IS SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE TO TRY ANTHONY STARK, MARIA HILL AND TIMOTHY DUGAN FOR CHARGES OF TERRORISM...
FURTHERMORE, WE HAVE FOUND ANTHONY STARK GUILTY OF MULTIPLE VIOLATIONS OF THE SUPERHUMAN REGISTRATION ACT.
FORTHWITH, THE DEFENDANTS WILL BE IMMEDIATELY REMANDED INTO FEDERAL CUSTODY TO AWAIT TRIAL.
MR. STARK, YOU ARE HEREBY TERMINATED AS DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D., SUSPENDED OF ALL RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES GRANTED UNDER THE S.H.R.A. AND WILL BE TRANSPORTED TO 42...
"TRAP DOOR" IS GREEN. REPEAT, "TRAP DOOR" IS GREEN.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU--
CHA-BOOM!

WAIT--!?
MOVE! MOVE! MOVE!
WHAT IS THIS--!
FREEZE!
HOW DARE--!
DAMMIT, DUGAN! YOU CAN'T JUST BUST US OUT--
ARE YOU NUTS? I DIDN'T--
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, SIR, I AM ONLY FOLLOWING YOUR ORDERS.
YOU DID, SIR. AS I RECALL, YOU SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED ME TO PLAY IT "NICK FURY" DIRTY.
LADIES AND GENTLEMAN, PLEASE REMAIN SEATED FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY! UNDER U.N. ARTICLE 917, S.H.I.E.L.D. HAS LOCKED DOWN THIS FACILITY FROM EXTERNAL ATTACK!
BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM

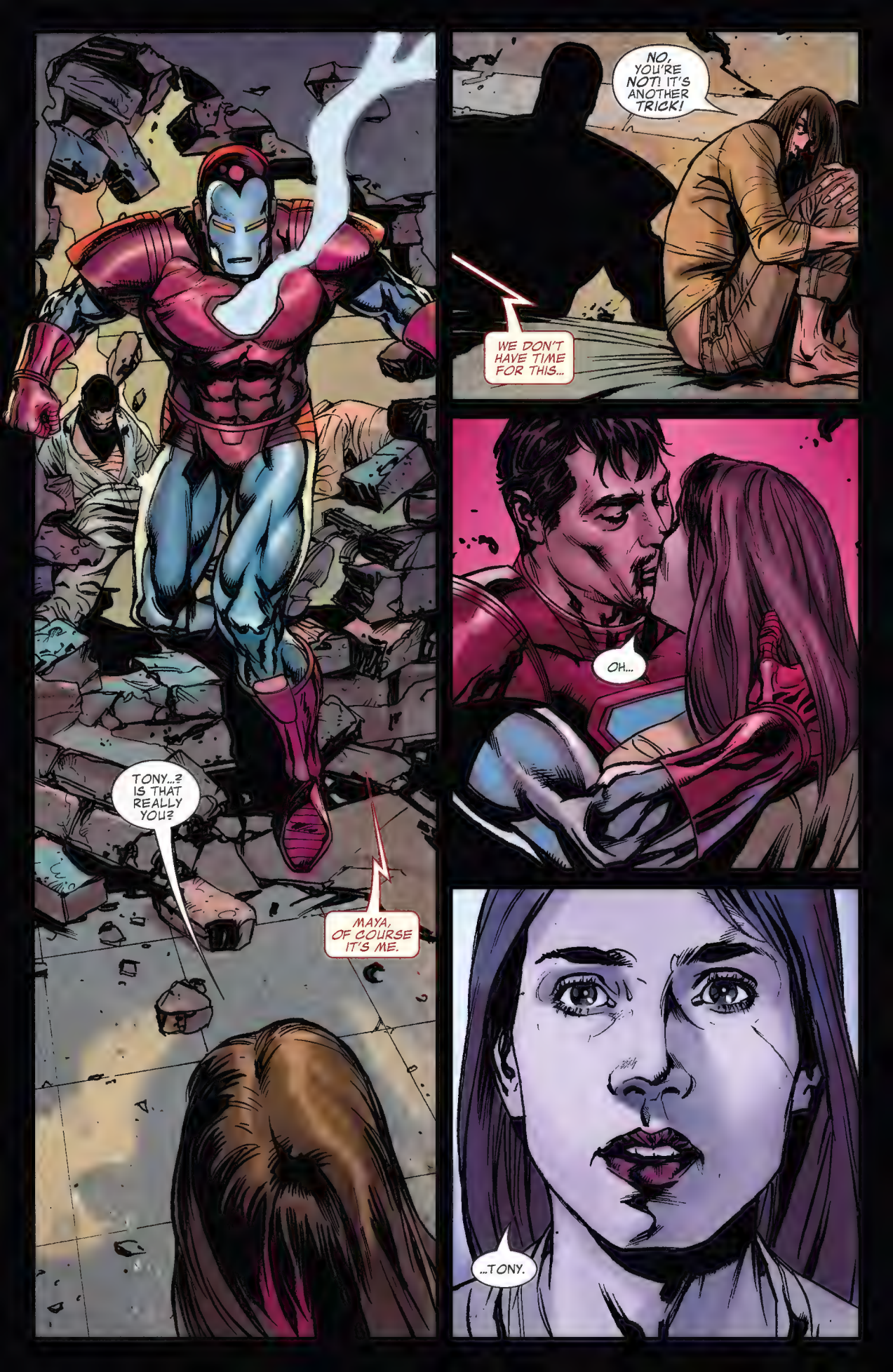

EXTERNAL ATTACK?! WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
YOU HEARD THE TESTIMONY, DIRECTOR OSBORN. I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE AN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL IS IN POSSESSION OF A W.M.D.
YOU HAVE NO AUTHORIZATION--
ON THE CONTRARY, COMMISSIONER COOPER, THIS ACTION IS FULLY WITHIN MY DISCRETION AS DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D.
DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D.?! WHO APPOINTED YOU?!
YOU DID, COMMISSIONER.
THE MOMENT YOU TERMINATED DIRECTOR STARK. I AM HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND, AND THE DUTIES OF HIS OFFICE FALL TO ME.
AS YOU KNOW, ONE OF THOSE DUTIES IS THE SECURITY OF THIS FACILITY, A RESPONSIBILITY I PLAN ON EXECUTING WITH EXTREME PREJUDICE...
...AT LEAST UNTIL THE SECURITY COUNCIL APPOINTS A NEW DIRECTOR.
THE LAST TIME THEY APPOINTED A NEW DIRECTOR, IT TOOK THEM EIGHTEEN MONTHS...
WE CLOCK THE MILITARY'S RESPONSE ANYWHERE BETWEEN FORTY-FIVE MINUTES AND AN HOUR.
IT'D TAKE THE SECURITY COUNCIL THAT LONG TO FIGURE OUT WHETHER THEY WANTED A SIDE OF FRIES.

S.H.I.E.L.D. IS THE ONLY AGENCY WITH LEGAL JURISDICTION INSIDE THE U.N. GROUNDS, AND WE'RE THE ONES WHO'VE LOCKED IT DOWN.
BY THE TIME THEY SORT IT OUT, GROW A SET AND EXECUTE A BREACH, YOU'LL BE LONG GONE.
SO WHAT? WE JUST HANG MARIA OUT TO DRY?
YOU TAKE CARE OF YOUR END, THEY'LL PIN A MEDAL ON HER AND GIVE HER A DAMN TICKER-TAPE PARADE.
AND JUST WHAT THE HELL IS MY END?
TO TRACK THE MANDARIN DOWN AND TAKE HIM OUT.
BEFORE THE SUITS STARTED HACKING AT OUR BUDGET, FURY HAD PLACES LIKE THIS ALL OVER. YOU SHOULDA SEEN THE ONE UNDER THE OVAL OFFICE...
WE'VE STILL GOT REAL-TIME ACTIVE TAPS ON EVERY INTELLIGENCE BRANCH AND SECURITY AGENCY IN THE WORLD.

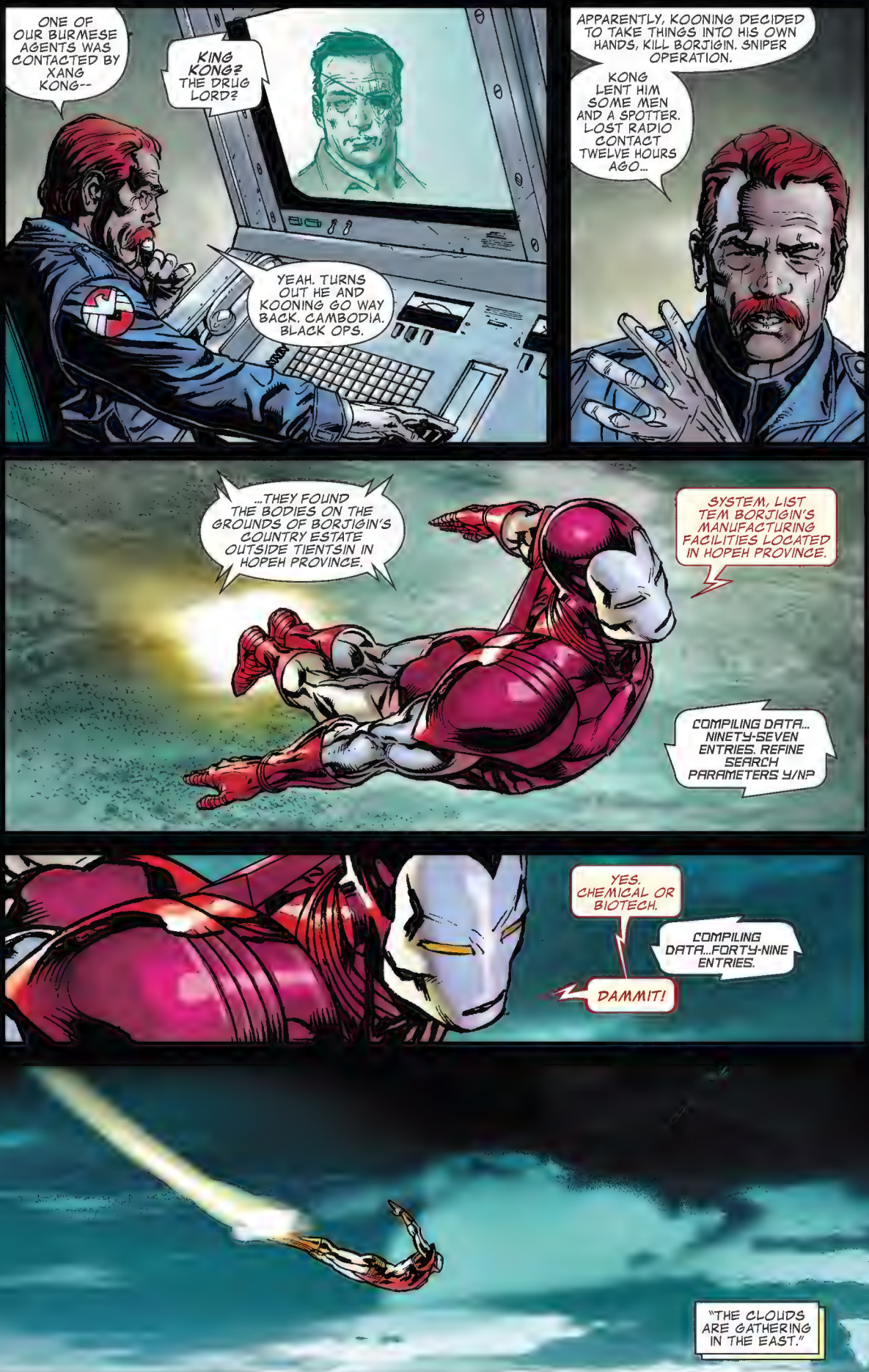
PLEASE DON'T TELL ME THAT'S AN "ESCAPE POD."
DAMN RIGHT. IT'LL TAKE YOU DOWN A SHAFT UNDER THE EAST RIVER TO AN AIR-LOCK--
LET ME GUESS. THE AIR-LOCK LEADS TO A MINI-SUB.
IT USED TO, BUT THAT FLAKE ABIGAIL BRAND BORROWED IT FOR A S.W.O.R.D. OPERATION AND NEVER RETURNED IT.
I REALLY LIKED THAT MINI-SUB...
GREAT, SO WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO? HOLD MY BREATH AND HOPE FOR THE BEST?
AWW, HELL NO...
...I GOT THAT COVERED.
HAD YOUR CONEY ISLAND OFFICE SEND YOU OVER A CHANGE OF CLOTHES.
OH, YEAH. THAT'LL DO.

I'M UPLOADING THE LIST OF TEM BORJIGIN'S FACTORIES INTO YOUR ARMOR'S CPU.
CHECK. SAT-LINK ME TO YOUR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS.

THAT'S ODD...
WHAT?
A RUSSIAN TUPOLEV SPY-PLANE IS PICKING UP HEAT SIGNATURES IN THE AN HU PO HOSPITAL.
I THOUGHT THE CHINESE SHUT THAT PLACE DOWN AFTER OUR RAID.
EXACTLY. I'M CLIMBING INTO SUBORBIT....
...MAINTAIN RADIO SILENCE. OUT.
NEI MONGGOL PROVINCE, CHINA
AN HU PO STATE PSYCHIATRIC FACILITY
KA-BOOM!
TATATATATATATATA!
SHRA-CHOOOOM!
BLAM! BLAM!
AHHHHHH--!
BOOM!

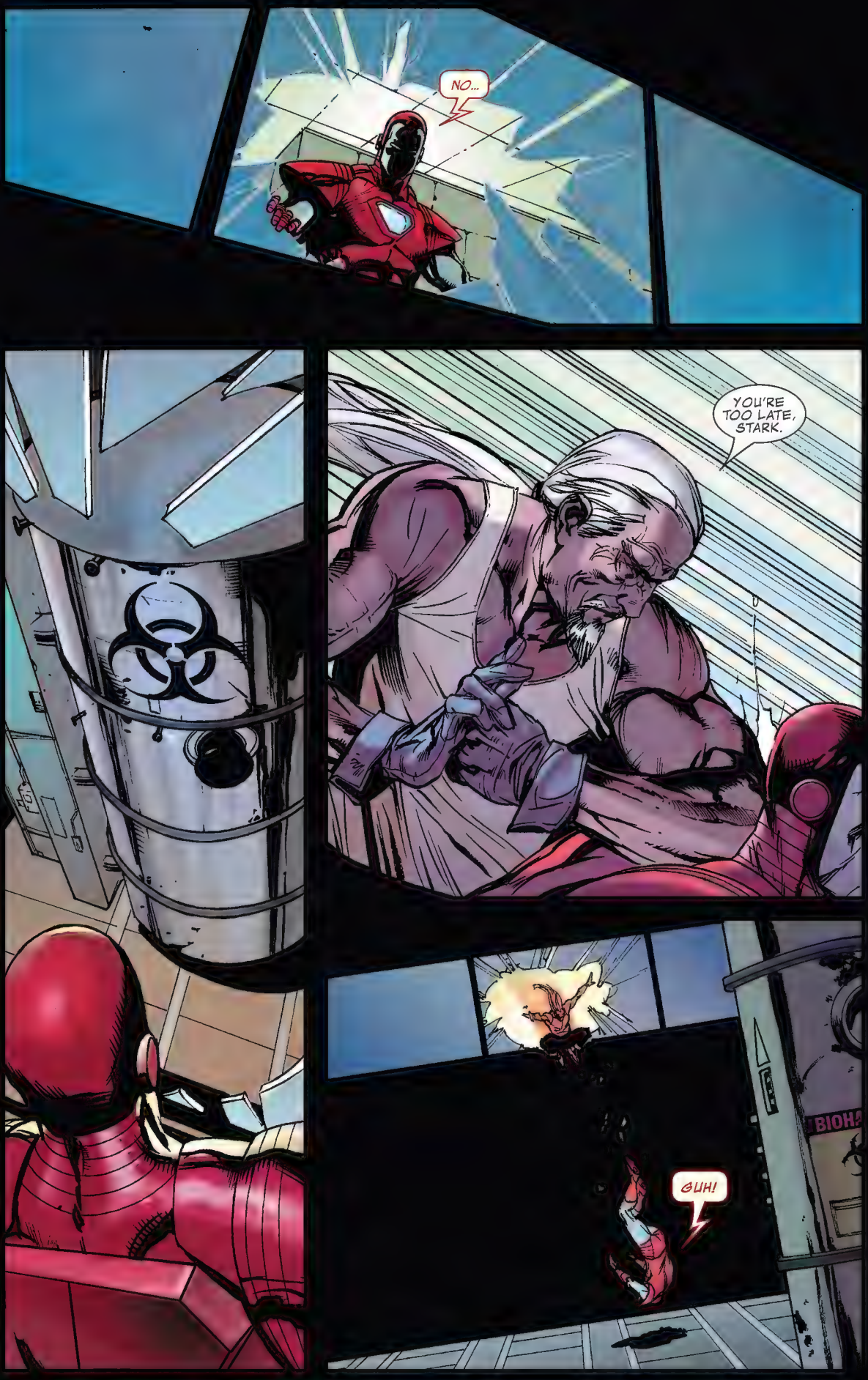

NO, YOU'RE NOT! IT'S ANOTHER TRICK!
WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS...
OH...
TONY...? IS THAT REALLY YOU?
MAYA, OF COURSE IT'S ME.
...TONY.

I'M SUCH AN IDIOT.
THE MANDARIN... HE TRICKED ME.
MADE ME THINK HE WAS YOU. I TOLD HIM EVERYTHING...THE FULL ENCODING SEQUENCE...
TELL ME WHERE HE IS.
I-I DON'T KNOW.
WHAT ABOUT EXTREMIS? SPECS?
THE AIRBORNE STRAIN IS MODELLED ON THE NANO-CAM TECH I DEVELOPED FOR S.H.I.E.L.D. SELF-REPLICATING, VIRTUALLY UNSTOPPABLE.
DUGAN, SITREP.
WE'RE SECURE. NATIONAL GUARD'S TAKEN POSITIONS AROUND THE BUILDING...
AS PREDICTED, A TOTAL JURISDICTIONAL NIGHTMARE. IT'LL BE HOURS BEFORE THEY SORT IT OUT.
THEY STILL THINK I'M INSIDE?
YEAH. GOT SOME INTERESTING NEWS, THOUGH...
...JACK KOONING'S DEAD.


ONE OF OUR BURMESE AGENTS WAS CONTACTED BY XANG KONG--
KING KONG? THE DRUG LORD?
YEAH. TURNS OUT HE AND KOONING GO WAY BACK. CAMBODIA. BLACK OPS.
APPARENTLY, KOONING DECIDED TO TAKE THINGS INTO HIS OWN HANDS, KILL BORJIGIN. SNIPER OPERATION.
KONG LENT HIM SOME MEN AND A SPOTTER. LOST RADIO CONTACT TWELVE HOURS AGO...
...THEY FOUND THE BODIES ON THE GROUNDS OF BORJIGIN'S COUNTRY ESTATE OUTSIDE TIENTSIN IN HOPEH PROVINCE.
SYSTEM, LIST TEM BORJIGIN'S MANUFACTURING FACILITIES LOCATED IN HOPEH PROVINCE.
COMPILING DATA... NINETY-SEVEN ENTRIES. REFINE SEARCH PARAMETERS Y/N?
YES. CHEMICAL OR BIOTECH.
COMPILING DATA...FORTY-NINE ENTRIES.
DAMMIT!
"THE CLOUDS ARE GATHERING IN THE EAST."

"LOOKS LIKE RAIN."
"YES, SON..."
...SOON.
SYSTEM! SEARCH BORJGIN FACTORIES IN HOPEH! KEYWORD "CLIMATE MODIFICATION!"
COMPILING DATA...ONE ENTRY...
...I-CLIME, INCORPORATED.
BOOM!
BOOM!
BOOM!

UNH!
WHA-CRASH!!
WHA-CRASH!!
WHA-CRASH!!
KA-BOOM!!

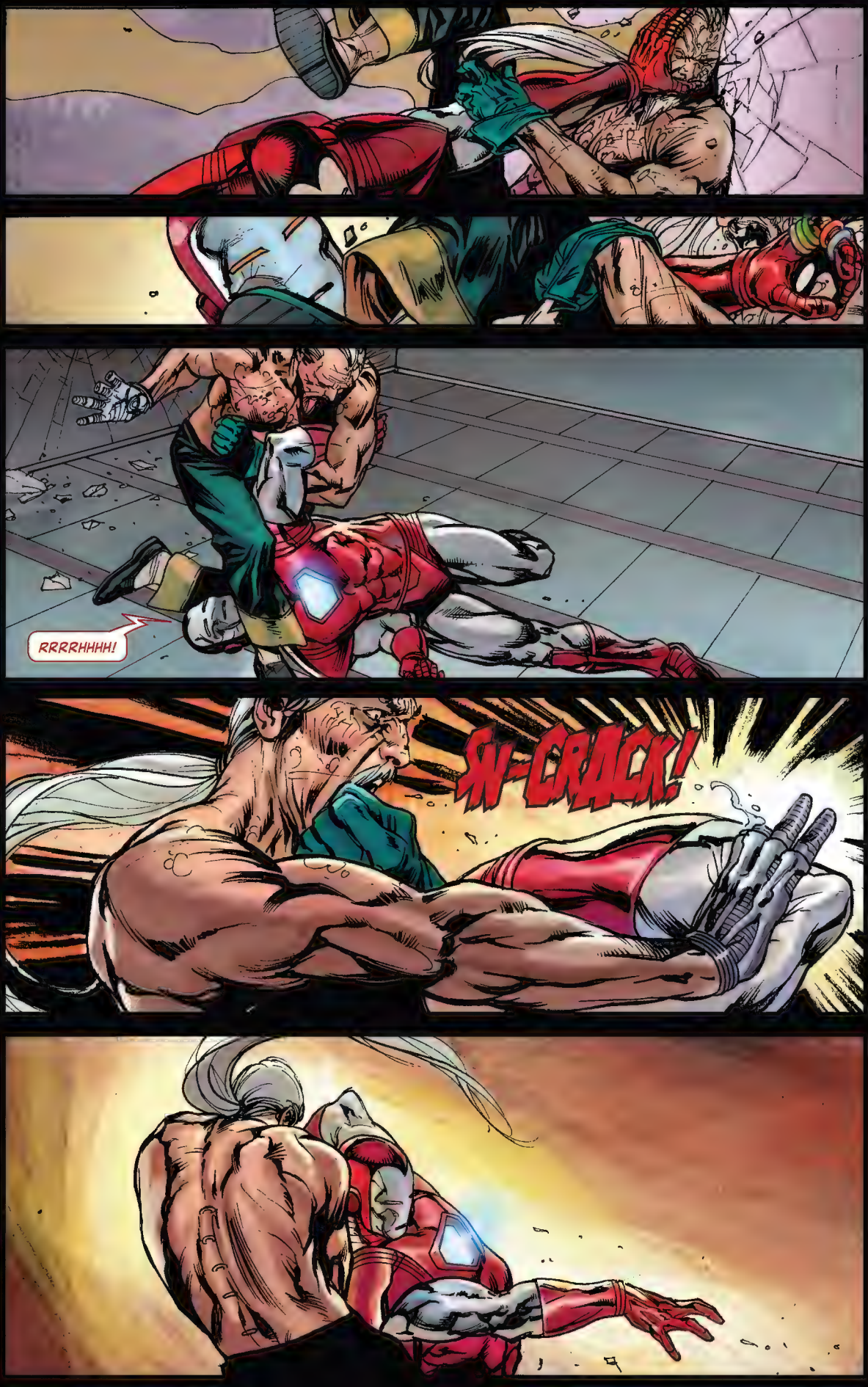

NO...
YOU'RE TOO LATE, STARK.
GUH!

SEEDING THE CLOUDS WITH AIRBORNE EXTREMIS?
I'M IMPRESSED, STARK. YOU'RE VERY RESOURCEFUL. BUT, AS USUAL, YOUR TIMING LEAVES SOMETHING TO BE DESIRED--
...I'LL JUST TAKE THOSE RINGS ONE AT A TIME.
DAMN. DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH THESE THINGS COST...?
OH, YES. OF COURSE YOU DO...
THAT'S RIGHT, MANDARIN, KEEP TALKING.
I BOUGHT THEM FROM YOUR MEDICAL PROSTHETIC DIVISION.
DAMMIT! HE'S GOT ALL OF THEM FUSED IN HIS SPINE!

NO!

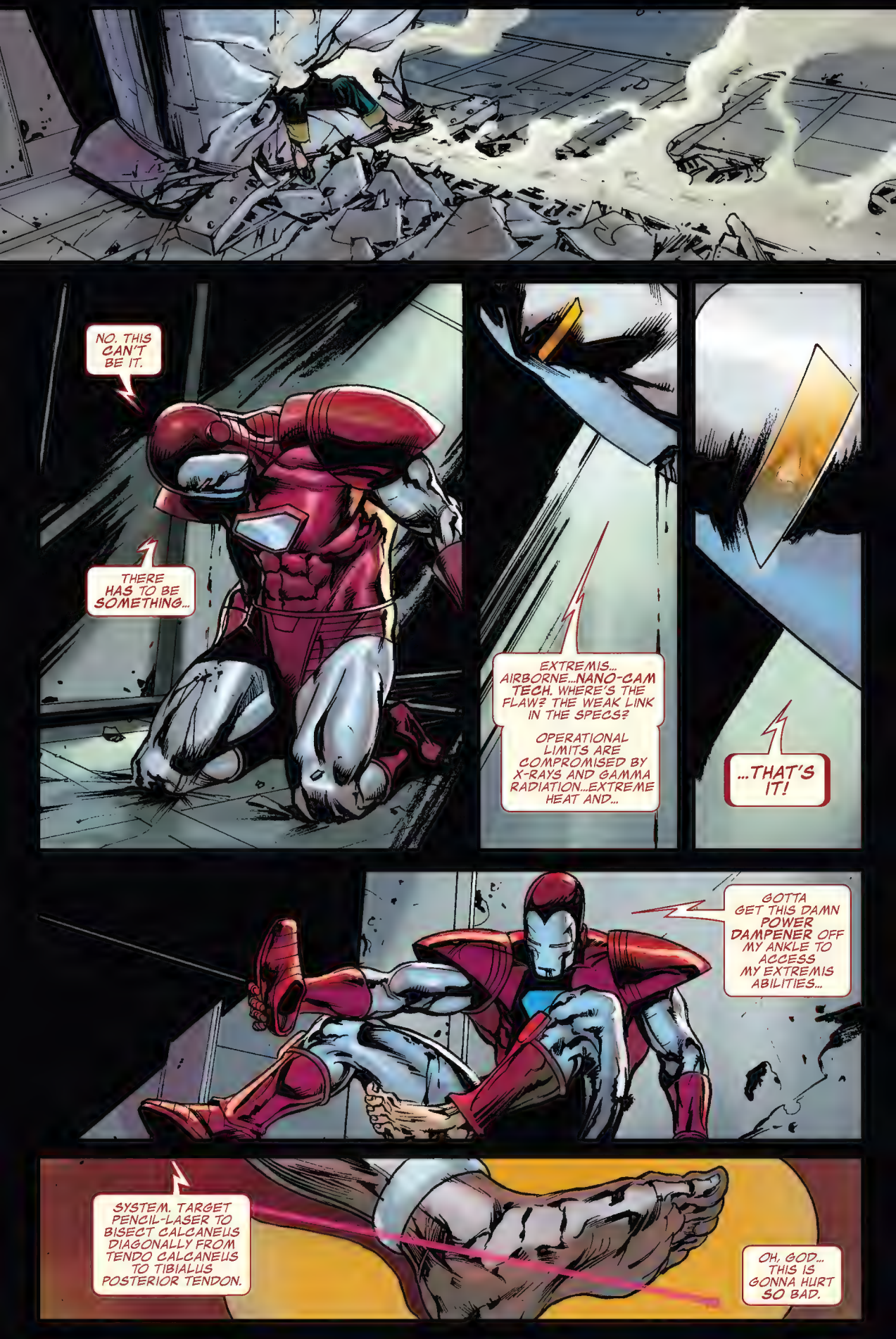
EVEN YOU... CANNOT...
...FIGHT DESTINY!
TH

EEEYAAAAHHHHH!


RRRRHHHH!
KN-CRACK!

KRACK!
UH!
WHERE ARE THE WARHEADS?
JUST BEFORE YOU ARRIVED...I RECEIVED CONFIRMATION...
"...OVER TWO-HUNDRED I-CLIME WEATHER MODIFICATION MISSILES AT FORTY-TWO LAUNCH SITES...INITIATED COUNTDOWN...
"...AND AT THIS VERY MOMENT ARE... LAUNCHING..."
CHECKMATE, STARK...YOU LOSE...
...HUMANITY WINS.

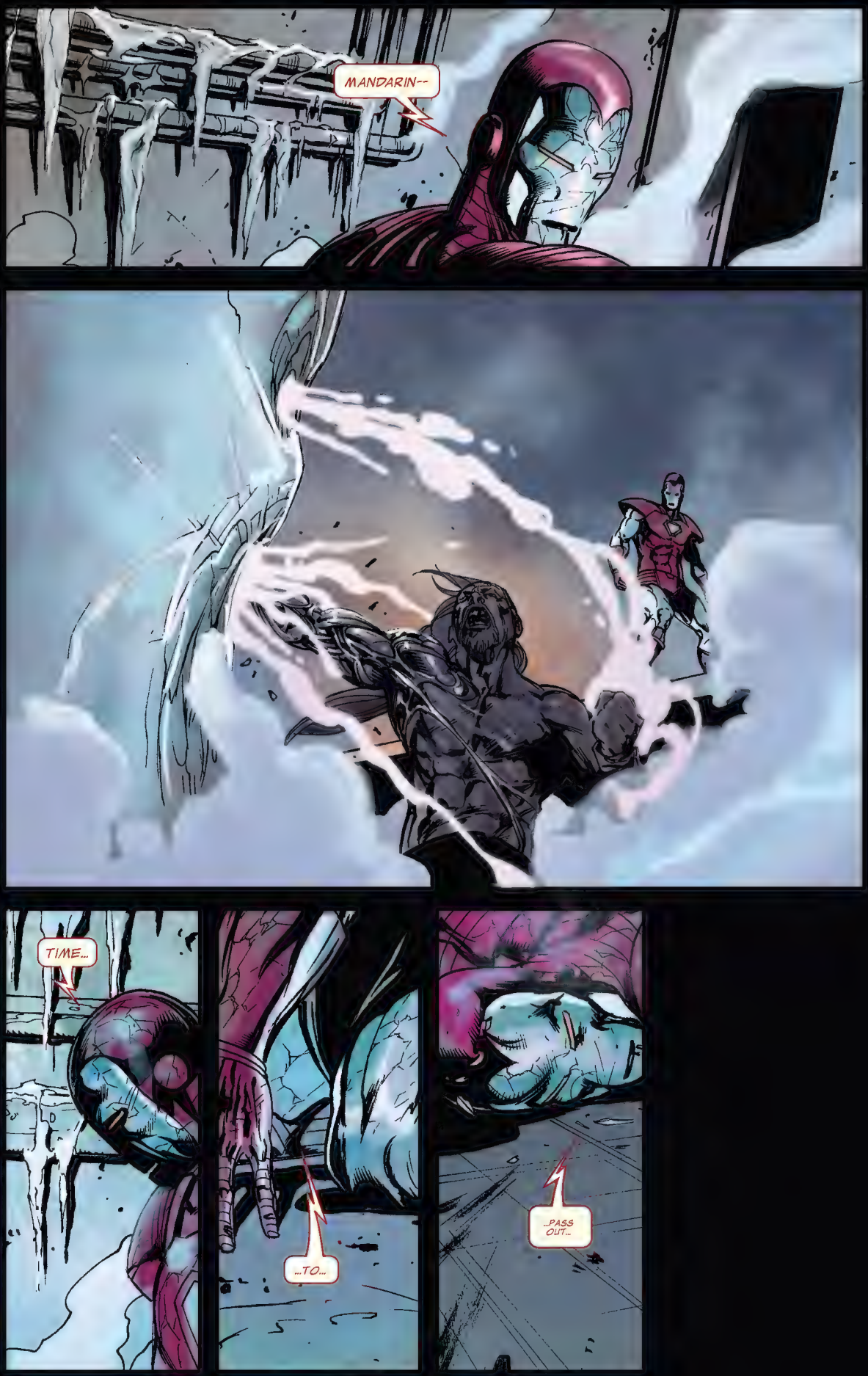
YOU MADMAN!


NO. THIS CAN'T BE IT.
THERE HAS TO BE SOMETHING...
EXTREMIS... AIRBORNE...NANO-CAM TECH. WHERE'S THE FLAW? THE WEAK LINK IN THE SPECS?
OPERATIONAL LIMITS ARE COMPROMISED BY X-RAYS AND GAMMA RADIATION...EXTREME HEAT AND...
...THAT'S IT!
GOTTA GET THIS DAMN POWER DAMPENER OFF MY ANKLE TO ACCESS MY EXTREMIS ABILITIES...
SYSTEM. TARGET PENCIL-LASER TO BISECT CALCANEUS DIAGONALLY FROM TENDO CALCANEUS TO TIBIALUS POSTERIOR TENDON.
OH, GOD... THIS IS GONNA HURT SO BAD.

RRRAAAAHHGGGG!
ZRRRRAAAAPPPP!
GAH!
INITIAL BOMBARDMENT OF INFORMATION TOO INTENSE!
HAVE... TO...
...FOCUS.
REACH OUT MENTALLY... FIND THE RIGHT...ENERGY SIGNATURE.
"GOT IT!
"LOCATING ALL MATCHING SIGNATURES...
"ALMOST...
AIK-10
"...YEAH. GOT 'EM ALL!

ACCESSING. BEIJING OFFICE OF ARTIFICIAL WEATHER INDUCEMENT NETWORK...
OVERRIDE TARGETING SYSTEM. REPROGRAM DETONATION ALTITUDE FROM TWO KILOMETERS TO ELEVEN-POINT FIVE KILOMETERS...
PUSH THEM UP...
"...INTO THE JET STREAM.
IT'S OVER, MANDARIN. YOU'RE UNDER ARREST.
NO... YOU'RE LYING... YOU COULDN'T STOP THEM...
I DIDN'T HAVE TO.
NANO-CAM TECH, THE BASIS OF YOUR EXTREMIS DELIVERY SYSTEM, IS DESTROYED BY EXTREME COLD...
I REMOTELY REPROGRAMMED THE MISSILES' TRAJECTORIES TO TAKE THEM UP INTO THE JET STREAM.
LAPSE RATES CALCULATE TO MINUS FIFTY DEGREES CENTIGRADE AT THAT ALTITUDE...
PLENTY COLD.

YOU REALLY SHOULD HAVE READ THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL.
READ THIS!
EXTREMIS!
WEAPON SYSTEM, DEPLOY FREON STREAM, STRENGTH, 100%...


MANDARIN--
TIME...
...TO...
...PASS OUT...

GOOD TO SEE YOU'RE UP, SIR.
I'VE SEEN GUYS RUN OVER BY TANKS THAT LOOKED BETTER THAN YOU DID WHEN THEY BROUGHT YOU IN.
MY FOOT...
COOL...
YEAH. THAT EXTREMIS HEALING FACTOR'S REALLY SOMETHING.
LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE A HERO AGAIN.
WE'LL SEE HOW LONG THAT LASTS.
TIMELY
HE SAVED US ALL
THE U.N. AND C.S.A DROPPED ALL CHARGES...
SURPRISE SURPRISE...
REINSTATED YOU AS DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D...
WHOOPEE...
AND CHINA WANTS TO GIVE YOU SOME SORT OF MEDAL.
OF COURSE THEY DO...
HOW DO YOU FEEL, SIR?
HOW DO I FEEL?
I SAVED NINETY-SEVEN-POINT-FIVE PERCENT OF THE HUMAN RACE. PROVED EVERYONE WHO DOUBTED ME WRONG...
...AND I KICKED THE LIVING CRAP OUT OF THE MANDARIN.
I FEEL GREAT, TIMOTHY.

BEIJING, CHINA
YEARS OF STILLNESS, MY HEART BEATING BUT ONCE A MINUTE, EXPLORING THE INFINITE WITHIN...
MY EXISTENCE-- EVERY MOMENT EXAMINED DISPASSIONATELY. MOMENTS AS PROFOUND AS A LIFE TAKEN IN ANGER, AS TRIVIAL AS AN ERRANT GLANCE...
SEARCHING FOR AN EPIPHANY, A FINAL RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE MAN I THINK I AM, AND THE MAN I AM...
I HAVE COMMANDED LEGIONS, AND YET I HAVE NEVER COMMANDED MYSELF--TOSSED BY RAGE, GREED AND ENVY LIKE THE FEATHER OF A CROW IN A TEMPEST...
BRRRRZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ
IT IS ONLY FITTING THAT I FIND MYSELF THE LORD OF A CASTLE OF LUNATICS...

...FOR ONLY MINDLESS EYES ARE FIT TO WITNESS MY CORONATION. THE MANDARIN IS GONE.
END.

MARVEL ONE-SHOT 1

ANNUAL

IRON MAN®

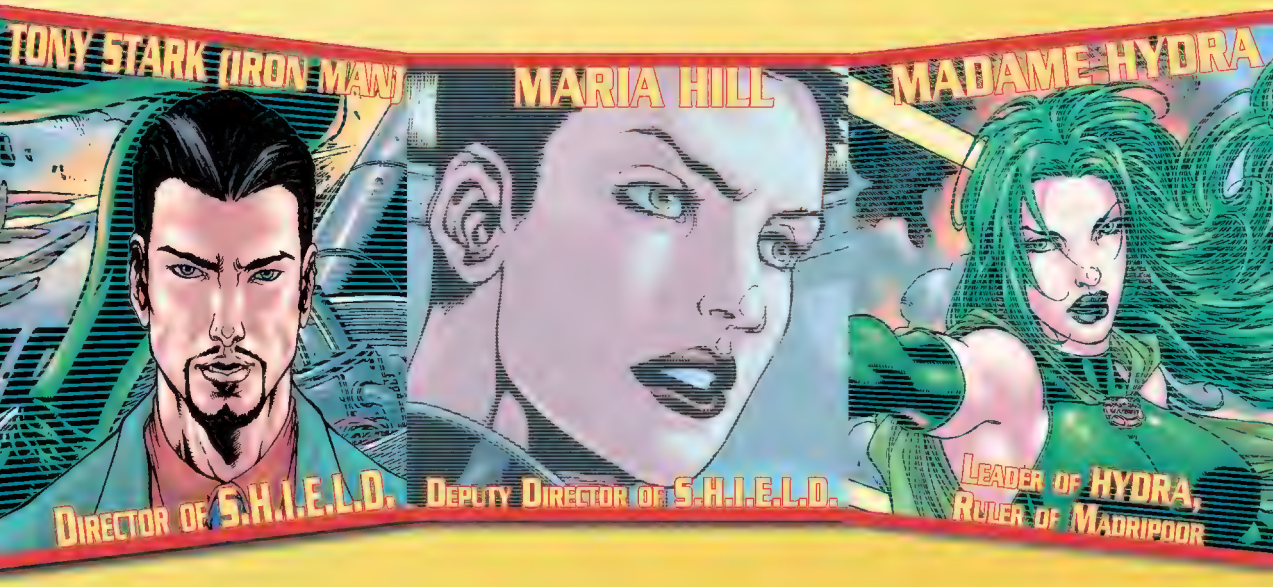
DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D.™

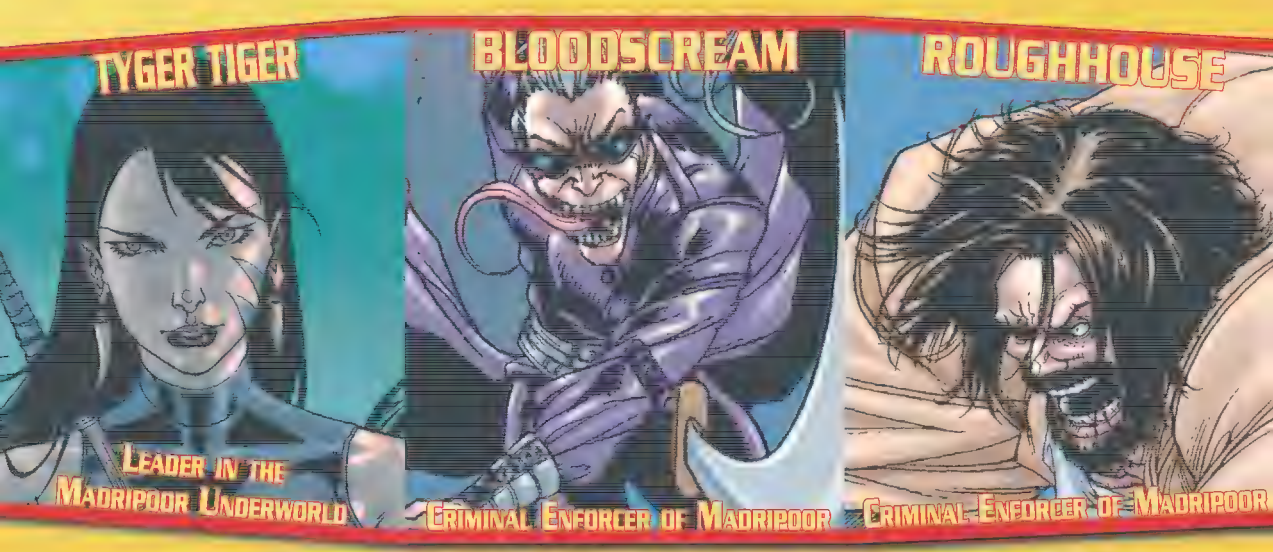
GAGE
TALIBAO
TADEO

WHEN BILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK DONS SOPHISTICATED STEEL-MESH ARMOR OF HIS OWN DESIGN, HE BECOMES A LIVING HIGH-TECH WEAPON--THE WORLD'S GREATEST HUMAN FIGHTING MACHINE.

THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

Tony Stark is currently the Director of S.H.I.E.L.D., an international intelligence and peacekeeping task force. One of their greatest and most enduring threats is Hydra, a worldwide organization seeking global domination.





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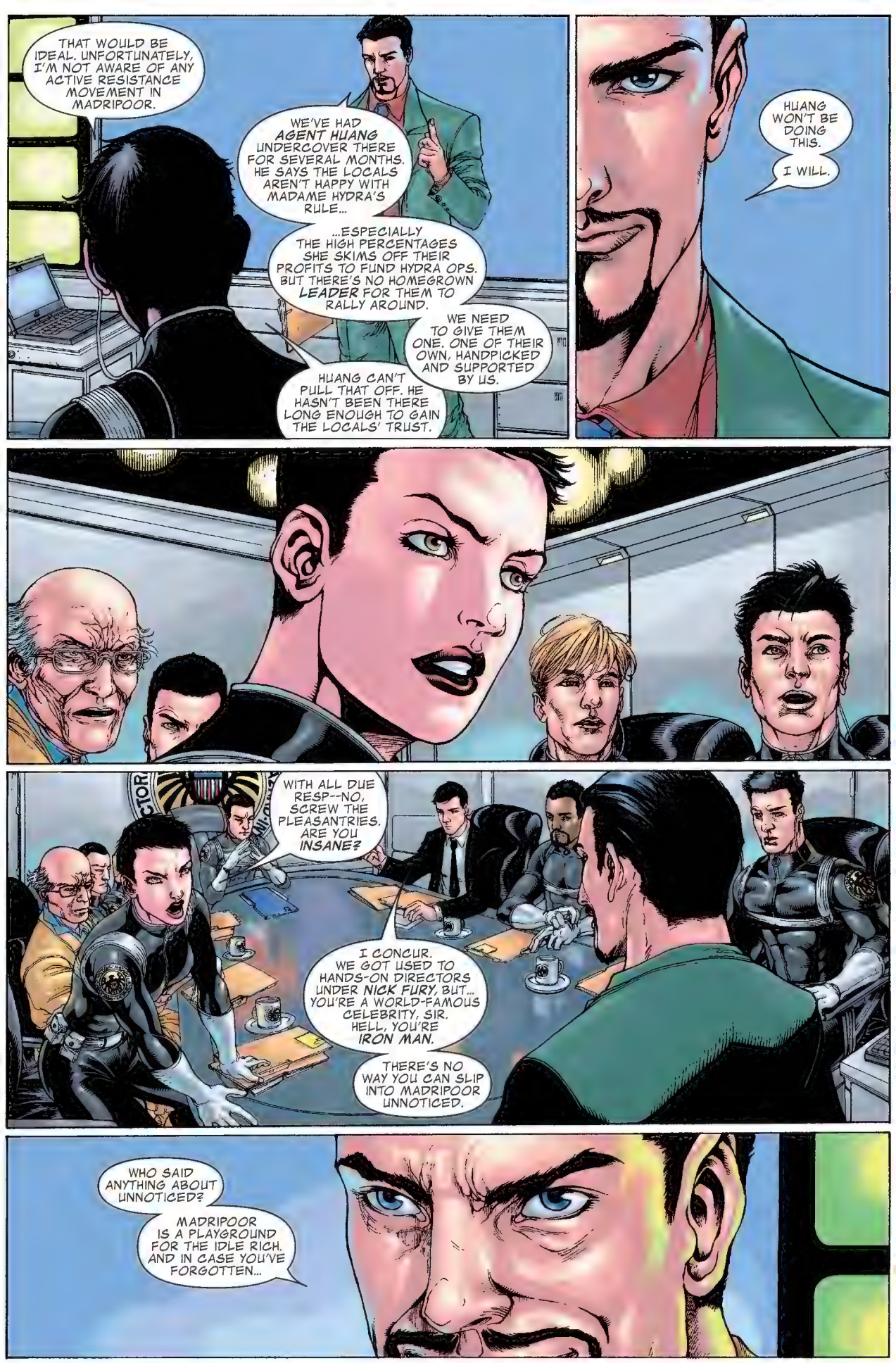
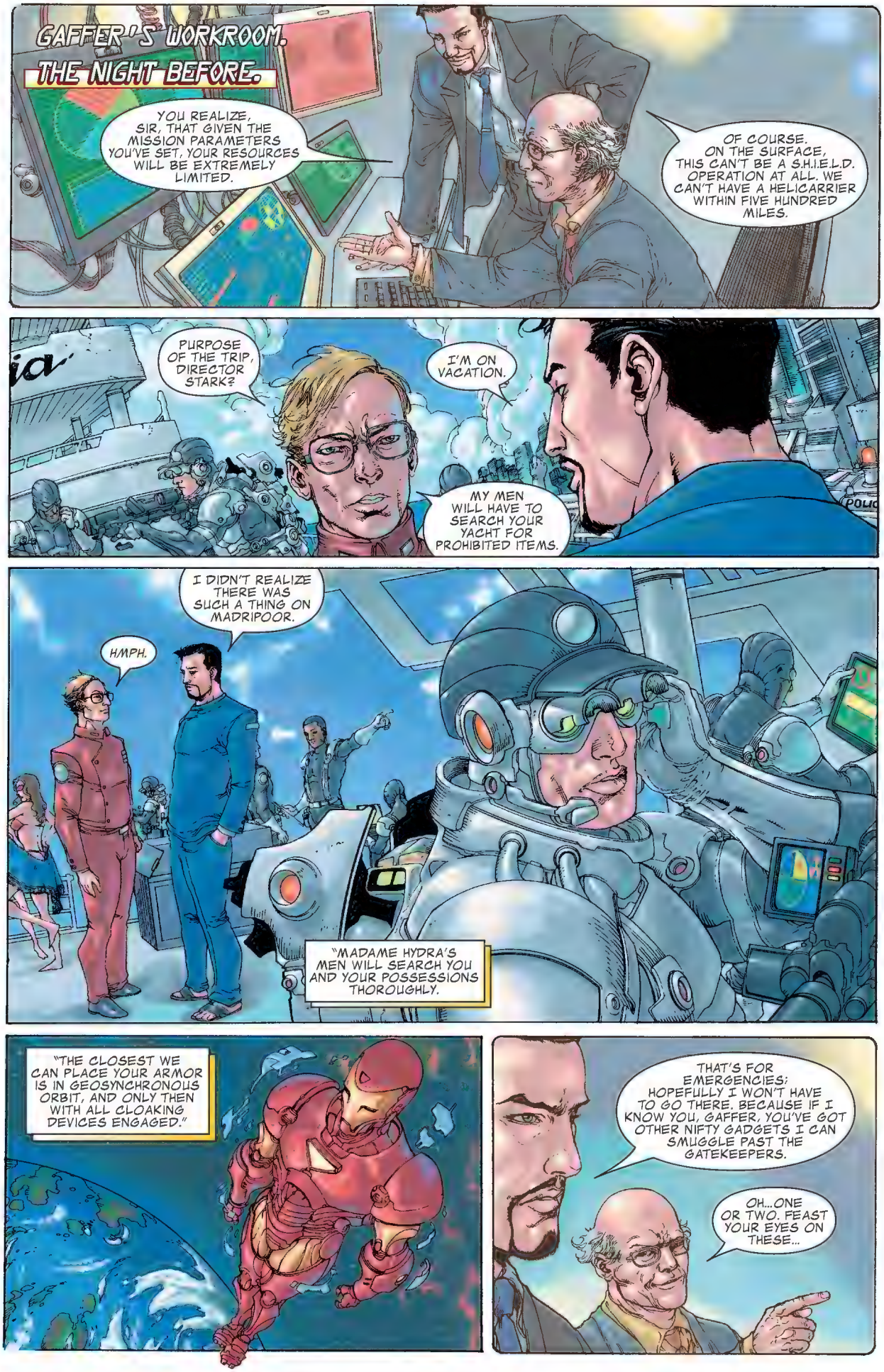
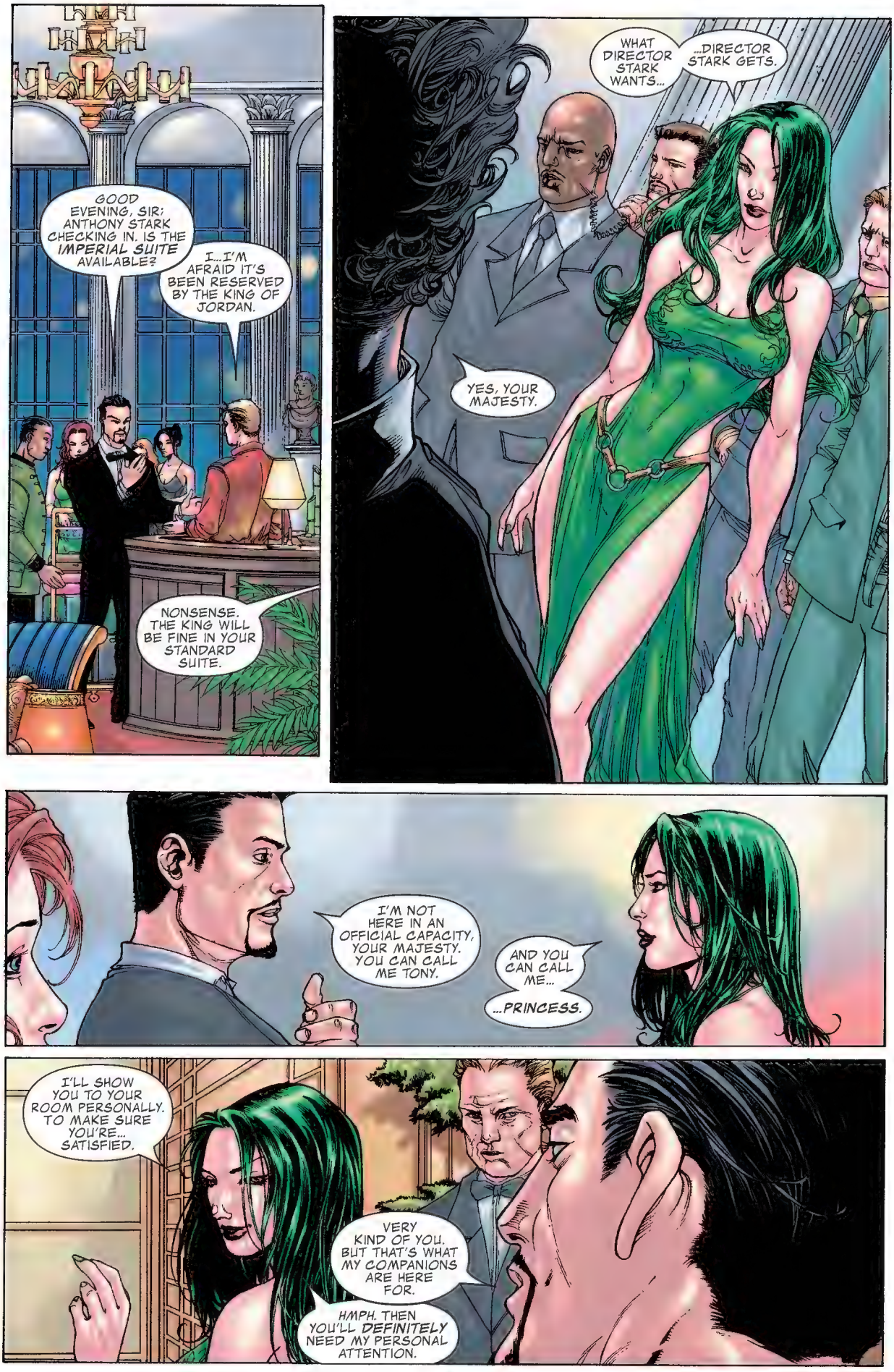
OTHER ALIASES INCLUDE THE VIPER, LEONA HISS, MERRIEM DREW, AND OPHELIA SARKISSIAN, WHICH JUST MIGHT BE HER REAL NAME.
THIS FOOTAGE IS FROM THE TIME SHE HIJACKED OUR HELICARRIER AND TRIED TO CRASH IT INTO CONGRESS DURING A PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.
THAT SHE ALMOST SUCCEEDED TELLS YOU ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HER THREAT LEVEL.
SHE COMMANDS THE MOST DANGEROUS CELL OF THE DEADLIEST TERRORIST ORGANIZATION ON EARTH.
WE KNOW EXACTLY WHERE SHE IS. WE KNOW SHE'S ACTIVELY PLANNING HYDRA OPERATIONS THAT WOULD RESULT IN THE DEATHS OF THOUSANDS.
AND WE CAN'T LAY A FINGER ON HER.

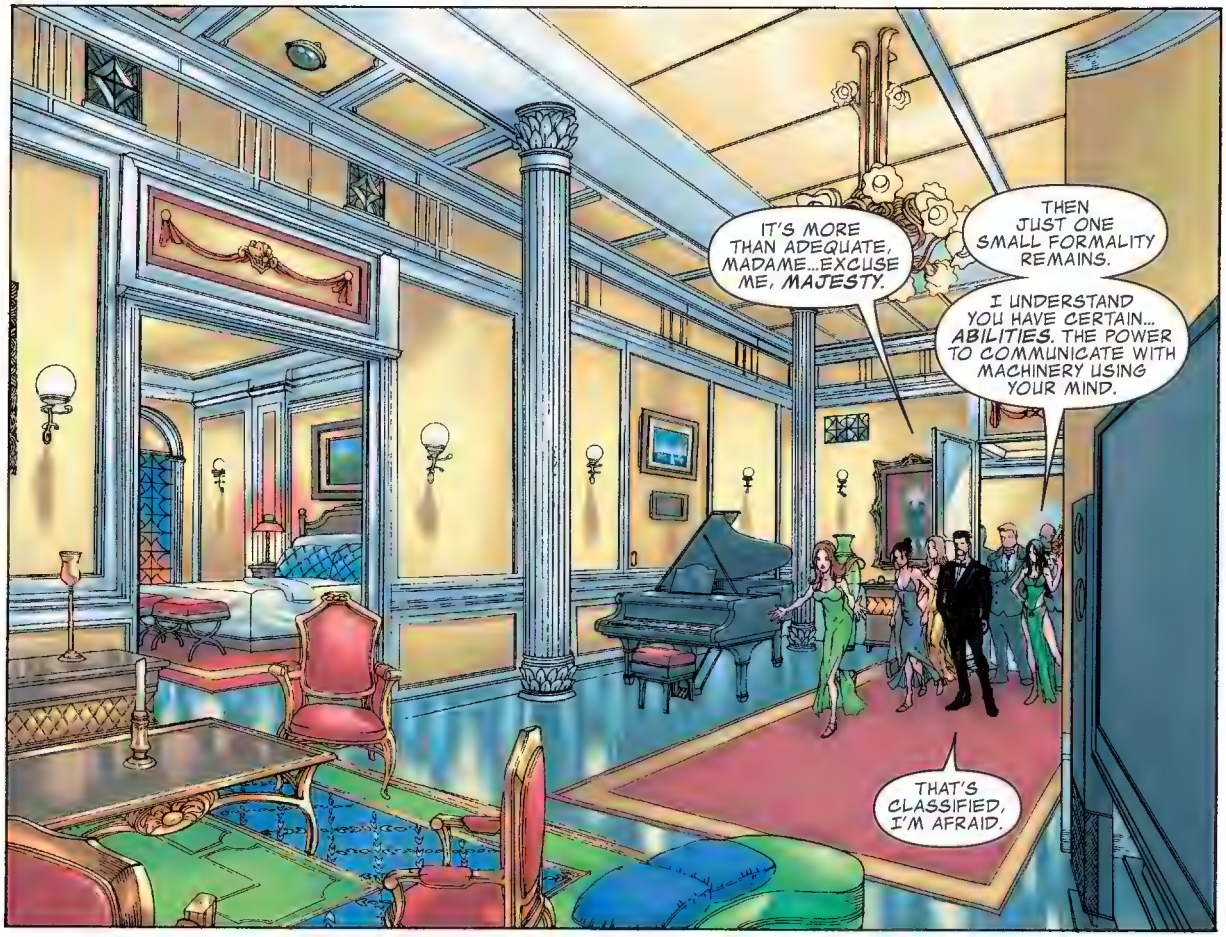
WE CAN'T TOUCH HER BECAUSE SHE IS ALSO RULER OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF MADRIPOOR, A SOVEREIGN ISLAND NATION.
MEANING SHE CAN DO PRETTY MUCH WHATEVER SHE PLEASES, AND UNLESS WE CATCH HER PERSONALLY ENGAGED IN PROVABLE TERRORIST ACTIVITIES...
...THERE'S NOT A DAMN THING WE CAN DO ABOUT IT.
NOT TO BE CRASS, DIRECTOR STARK, BUT I HAVEN'T HEARD YOU MENTION ANYTHING A SNIPER RIFLE CAN'T FIX.
DEPUTY DIRECTOR HILL HAS A POINT. OR, GIVEN MADAME HYDRA'S HISTORY, WE CERTAINLY HAVE DEFENSIBLE GROUNDS FOR GOING IN OPENLY AND DEPOSING HER.
IT'S A DELICATE SITUATION, GAFFER. S.H.I.E.L.D. MAY RECEIVE MOST OF ITS FUNDING FROM THE U.S., BUT WE'RE A GLOBAL PEACEKEEPING ORGANIZATION.
MOST MEMBER NATIONS WOULD FROWN ON OUR TOPPLING SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENTS WITHOUT A U.N. RESOLUTION.
WHICH WE'LL NEVER GET. GIVEN MADRIPOOR'S NOTORIOUS, SHALL WE SAY, LAISSEZ-FAIRE ATTITUDE TOWARD INTERNATIONAL LAW, EXTRADITION AND TAXATION...
...NEARLY EVERY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD HAS INTERESTS THERE. DIRTY LITTLE SECRETS THEY WOULDN'T WANT JEOPARDIZED... OR EXPOSED.
SO WE WAIT FOR MADAME HYDRA TO SLIP UP? WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, DIRECTOR, THAT'S A DANGEROUS GAME.
THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M SAYING AT ALL, MARIA. WE NEED A REGIME CHANGE IN MADRIPOOR. BUT AS WE'VE SEEN, WHEN AN OUTSIDE FORCE TOPPLES A NATION'S RULER...
...THEY BECOME RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT NATION. AND WINNING THE PEACE IS ALWAYS HARDER THAN WINNING THE WAR.
WE NEED CHANGE, YES. BUT WE NEED IT TO COME FROM WITHIN.
DIRECTORATE • STRATEGIC • HAZARD • INTERV

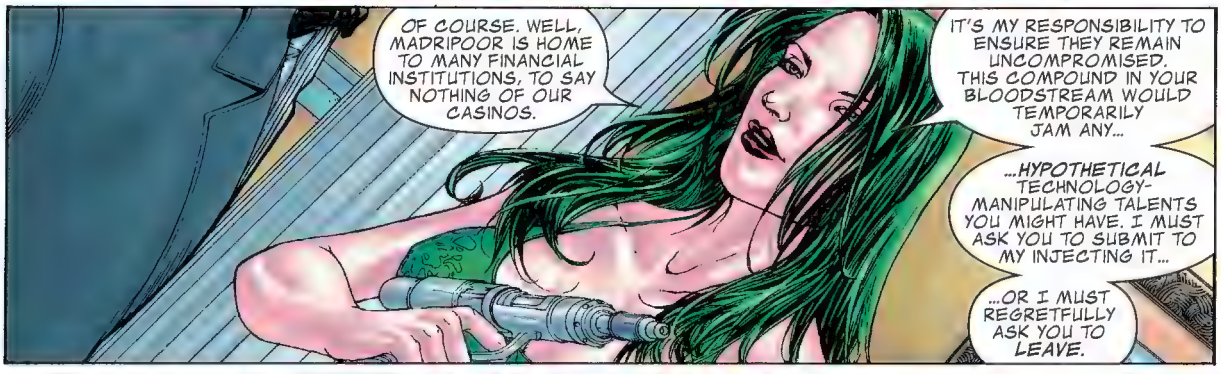

THAT WOULD BE IDEAL. UNFORTUNATELY, I'M NOT AWARE OF ANY ACTIVE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN MADRIPOOR.
WE'VE HAD AGENT HUANG UNDERCOVER THERE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. HE SAYS THE LOCALS AREN'T HAPPY WITH MADAME HYDRA'S RULE...
...ESPECIALLY THE HIGH PERCENTAGES SHE SKIMS OFF THEIR PROFITS TO FUND HYDRA OPS. BUT THERE'S NO HOMEGROWN LEADER FOR THEM TO RALLY AROUND.
WE NEED TO GIVE THEM ONE. ONE OF THEIR OWN, HANDPICKED AND SUPPORTED BY US.
HUANG CAN'T PULL THAT OFF. HE HASN'T BEEN THERE LONG ENOUGH TO GAIN THE LOCALS' TRUST.
HUANG WON'T BE DOING THIS.
I WILL.
WITH ALL DUE RESP--NO, SCREW THE PLEASANTRIES. ARE YOU INSANE?
I CONCUR. WE GOT USED TO HANDS-ON DIRECTORS UNDER NICK FURY, BUT... YOU'RE A WORLD-FAMOUS CELEBRITY, SIR. HELL, YOU'RE IRON MAN.
THERE'S NO WAY YOU CAN SLIP INTO MADRIPOOR UNNOTICED.
WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT UNNOTICED?
MADRIPOOR IS A PLAYGROUND FOR THE IDLE RICH. AND IN CASE YOU'VE FORGOTTEN...

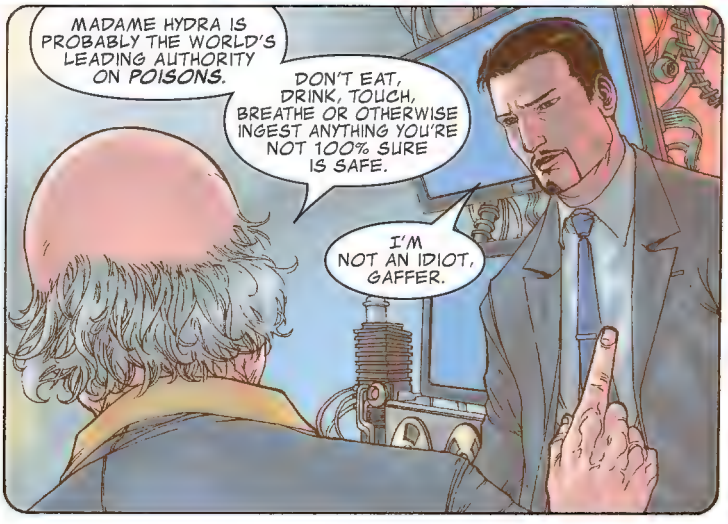
"...I'M A BILLIONAIRE PLAYBOY."
MADRIPOOR HARBOR
DON'T FORGET MY EARS, AGENT JONES.
YOU DO REALIZE I HAVE THREE PhDs.
AND MY NOSE. NOTHING WORSE THAN A SUNBURNED NOSE.
The Mania


GAFFER'S WORKROOM.
THE NIGHT BEFORE.
YOU REALIZE, SIR, THAT GIVEN THE MISSION PARAMETERS YOU'VE SET, YOUR RESOURCES WILL BE EXTREMELY LIMITED.
OF COURSE. ON THE SURFACE, THIS CAN'T BE A S.H.I.E.L.D. OPERATION AT ALL. WE CAN'T HAVE A HELICARRIER WITHIN FIVE HUNDRED MILES.
PURPOSE OF THE TRIP, DIRECTOR STARK?
I'M ON VACATION.
MY MEN WILL HAVE TO SEARCH YOUR YACHT FOR PROHIBITED ITEMS.
I DIDN'T REALIZE THERE WAS SUCH A THING ON MADRIPOOR.
HMPH.
"MADAME HYDRA'S MEN WILL SEARCH YOU AND YOUR POSSESSIONS THOROUGHLY.
"THE CLOSEST WE CAN PLACE YOUR ARMOR IS IN GEOSYNCHRONOUS ORBIT, AND ONLY THEN WITH ALL CLOAKING DEVICES ENGAGED."
THAT'S FOR EMERGENCIES; HOPEFULLY I WON'T HAVE TO GO THERE. BECAUSE IF I KNOW YOU, GAFFER, YOU'VE GOT OTHER NIFTY GADGETS I CAN SMUGGLE PAST THE GATEKEEPERS.
OH...ONE OR TWO. FEAST YOUR EYES ON THESE...

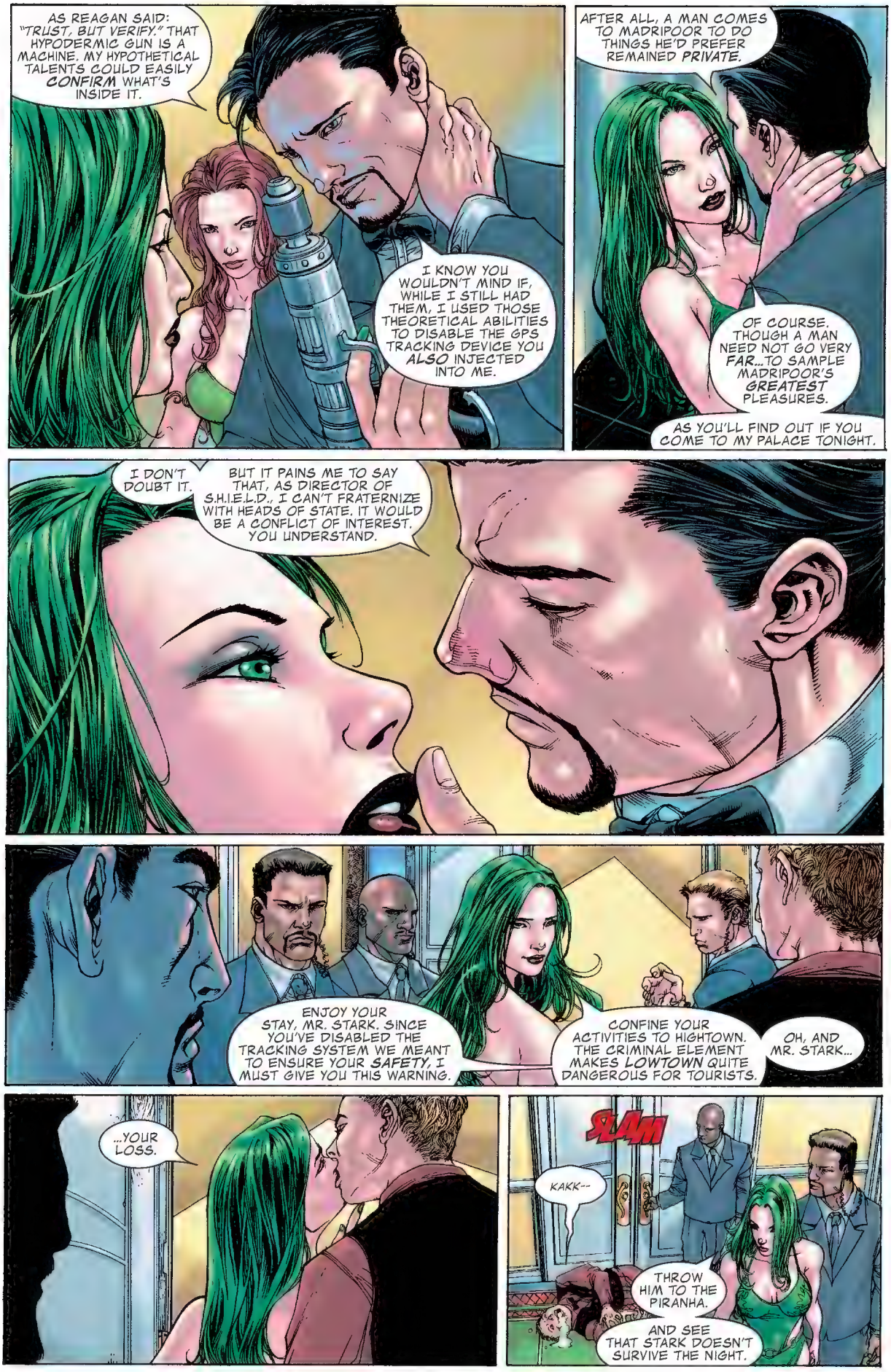

GOOD EVENING, SIR; ANTHONY STARK CHECKING IN. IS THE IMPERIAL SUITE AVAILABLE?
I...I'M AFRAID IT'S BEEN RESERVED BY THE KING OF JORDAN.
NONSENSE. THE KING WILL BE FINE IN YOUR STANDARD SUITE.
WHAT DIRECTOR STARK WANTS...
...DIRECTOR STARK GETS.
YES, YOUR MAJESTY.
I'M NOT HERE IN AN OFFICIAL CAPACITY, YOUR MAJESTY. YOU CAN CALL ME TONY.
AND YOU CAN CALL ME...
...PRINCESS.
I'LL SHOW YOU TO YOUR ROOM PERSONALLY. TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE... SATISFIED.
VERY KIND OF YOU. BUT THAT'S WHAT MY COMPANIONS ARE HERE FOR.
HMPH. THEN YOU'LL DEFINITELY NEED MY PERSONAL ATTENTION.

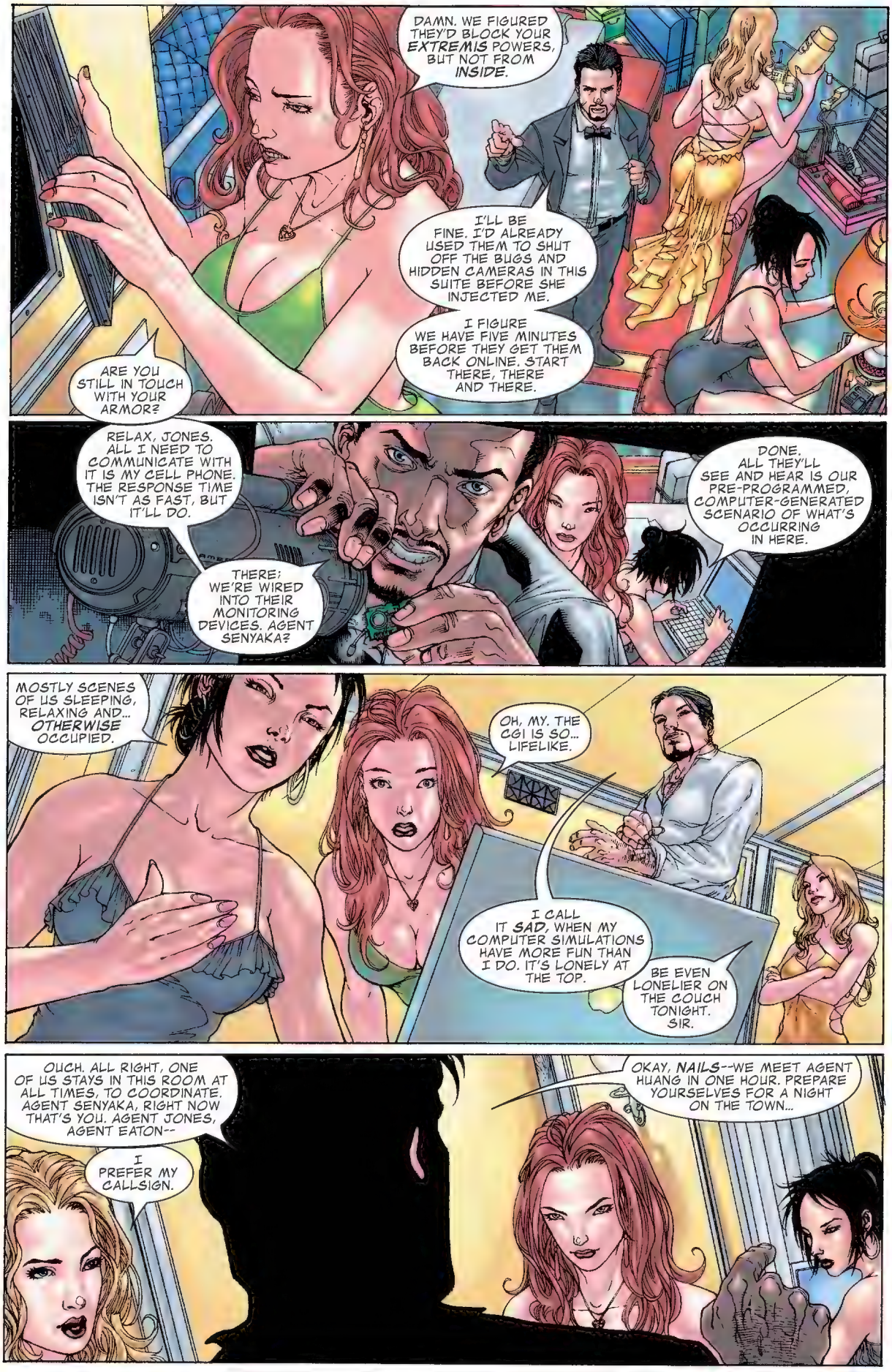

IT'S MORE THAN ADEQUATE, MADAME...EXCUSE ME, MAJESTY.
THEN JUST ONE SMALL FORMALITY REMAINS.
I UNDERSTAND YOU HAVE CERTAIN... ABILITIES. THE POWER TO COMMUNICATE WITH MACHINERY USING YOUR MIND.
THAT'S CLASSIFIED, I'M AFRAID.

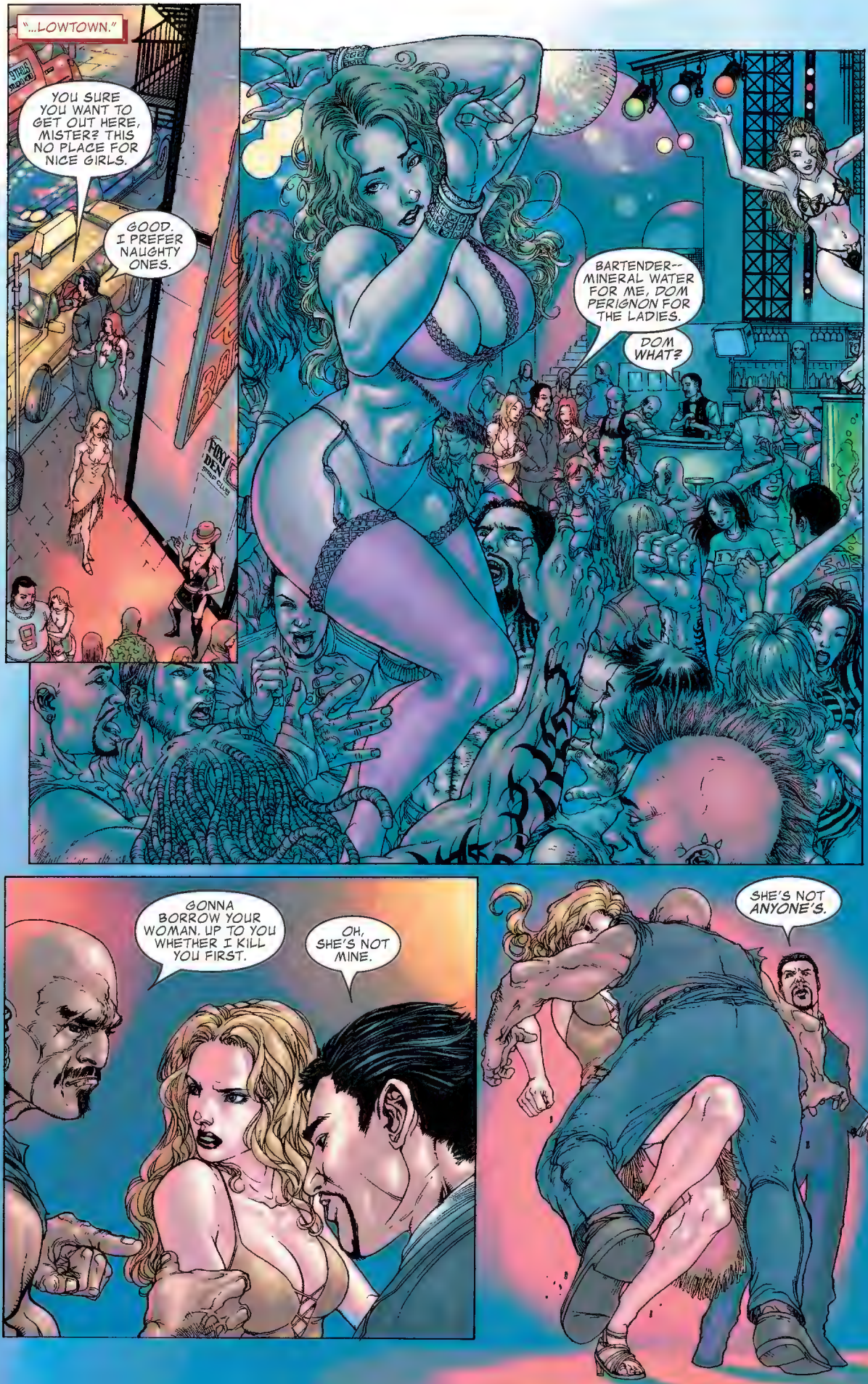

OF COURSE. WELL, MADRIPOOR IS HOME TO MANY FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, TO SAY NOTHING OF OUR CASINOS.
IT'S MY RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THEY REMAIN UNCOMPROMISED. THIS COMPOUND IN YOUR BLOODSTREAM WOULD TEMPORARILY JAM ANY...
...HYPOTHETICAL TECHNOLOGY-MANIPULATING TALENTS YOU MIGHT HAVE. I MUST ASK YOU TO SUBMIT TO MY INJECTING IT...
...OR I MUST REGRETFULLY ASK YOU TO LEAVE.


MADAME HYDRA IS PROBABLY THE WORLD'S LEADING AUTHORITY ON POISONS.
DON'T EAT, DRINK, TOUCH, BREATHE OR OTHERWISE INGEST ANYTHING YOU'RE NOT 100% SURE IS SAFE.
I'M NOT AN IDIOT, GAFFER.

I UNDERSTAND COMPLETELY. GO AHEAD.
I'M SO HAPPY WE TRUST EACH OTHER.
PHUT

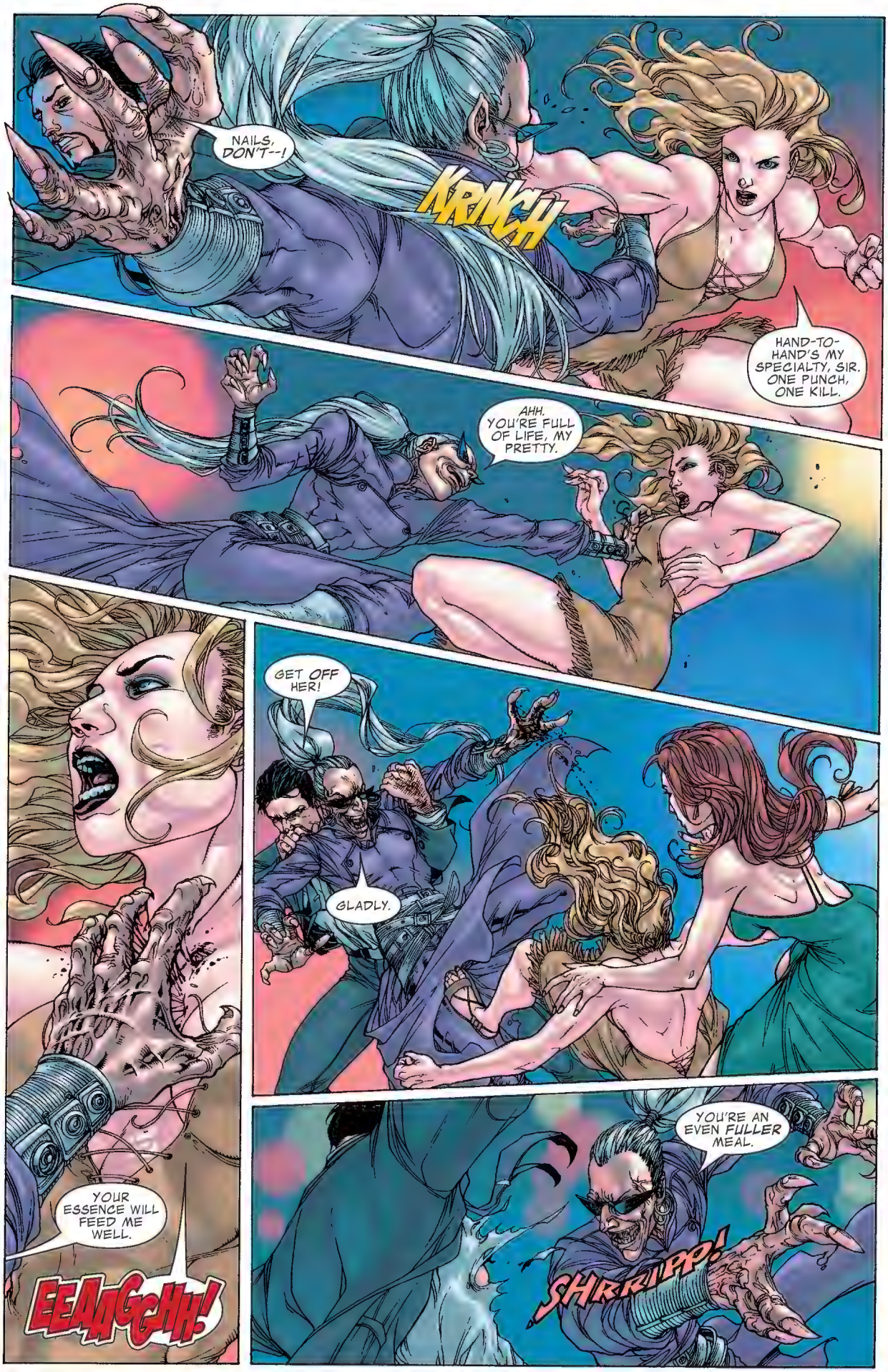

AS REAGAN SAID: "TRUST, BUT VERIFY." THAT HYPODERMIC GUN IS A MACHINE. MY HYPOTHETICAL TALENTS COULD EASILY CONFIRM WHAT'S INSIDE IT.
I KNOW YOU WOULDN'T MIND IF, WHILE I STILL HAD THEM, I USED THOSE THEORETICAL ABILITIES TO DISABLE THE GPS TRACKING DEVICE YOU ALSO INJECTED INTO ME.
AFTER ALL, A MAN COMES TO MADRIPOOR TO DO THINGS HE'D PREFER REMAINED PRIVATE.
OF COURSE. THOUGH A MAN NEED NOT GO VERY FAR...TO SAMPLE MADRIPOOR'S GREATEST PLEASURES.
AS YOU'LL FIND OUT IF YOU COME TO MY PALACE TONIGHT.
I DON'T DOUBT IT.
BUT IT PAINS ME TO SAY THAT, AS DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D., I CAN'T FRATERNIZE WITH HEADS OF STATE. IT WOULD BE A CONFLICT OF INTEREST. YOU UNDERSTAND.
ENJOY YOUR STAY, MR. STARK. SINCE YOU'VE DISABLED THE TRACKING SYSTEM WE MEANT TO ENSURE YOUR SAFETY, I MUST GIVE YOU THIS WARNING.
CONFINE YOUR ACTIVITIES TO HIGHTOWN. THE CRIMINAL ELEMENT MAKES LOWTOWN QUITE DANGEROUS FOR TOURISTS.
OH, AND MR. STARK...
...YOUR LOSS.
SLAM
KAKK--
THROW HIM TO THE PIRANHA.
AND SEE THAT STARK DOESN'T SURVIVE THE NIGHT.


DAMN. WE FIGURED THEY'D BLOCK YOUR EXTREMIS POWERS, BUT NOT FROM INSIDE.
I'LL BE FINE. I'D ALREADY USED THEM TO SHUT OFF THE BUGS AND HIDDEN CAMERAS IN THIS SUITE BEFORE SHE INJECTED ME.
I FIGURE WE HAVE FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THEY GET THEM BACK ONLINE. START THERE, THERE AND THERE.
ARE YOU STILL IN TOUCH WITH YOUR ARMOR?
RELAX, JONES. ALL I NEED TO COMMUNICATE WITH IT IS MY CELL PHONE. THE RESPONSE TIME ISN'T AS FAST, BUT IT'LL DO.
THERE; WE'RE WIRED INTO THEIR MONITORING DEVICES. AGENT SENYAKA?
DONE. ALL THEY'LL SEE AND HEAR IS OUR PRE-PROGRAMMED, COMPUTER-GENERATED SCENARIO OF WHAT'S OCCURRING IN HERE.
MOSTLY SCENES OF US SLEEPING, RELAXING AND... OTHERWISE OCCUPIED.
OH, MY. THE CGI IS SO... LIFELIKE.
I CALL IT SAD, WHEN MY COMPUTER SIMULATIONS HAVE MORE FUN THAN I DO. IT'S LONELY AT THE TOP.
BE EVEN LONELIER ON THE COUCH TONIGHT. SIR.
OUCH. ALL RIGHT, ONE OF US STAYS IN THIS ROOM AT ALL TIMES, TO COORDINATE. AGENT SENYAKA, RIGHT NOW THAT'S YOU. AGENT JONES, AGENT EATON--
I PREFER MY CALLSIGN.
OKAY, NAILS--WE MEET AGENT HUANG IN ONE HOUR. PREPARE YOURSELVES FOR A NIGHT ON THE TOWN...


"...LOWTOWN."
YOU SURE YOU WANT TO GET OUT HERE, MISTER? THIS NO PLACE FOR NICE GIRLS.
GOOD. I PREFER NAUGHTY ONES.
BARTENDER-- MINERAL WATER FOR ME, DOM PERIGNON FOR THE LADIES.
DOM WHAT?
GONNA BORROW YOUR WOMAN. UP TO YOU WHETHER I KILL YOU FIRST.
OH, SHE'S NOT MINE.
SHE'S NOT ANYONE'S.

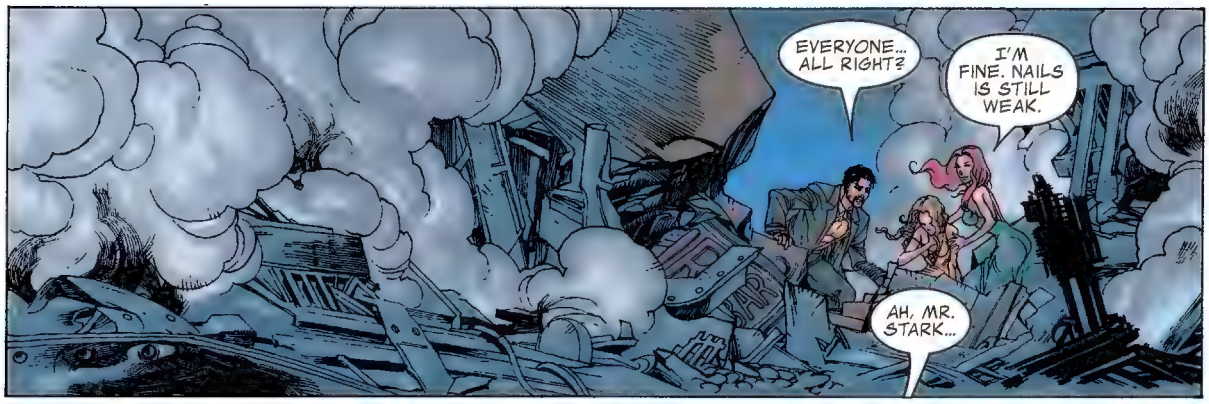
STANDARD RULES, FOLKS-- YOU BREAK IT, YOU BOUGHT IT.
WHAT'VE YOU GOT, AGENT HUANG?
THERE'S TWO PEOPLE THE LOCALS WOULD FOLLOW IN A REVOLT. ONE'S CALLED PATCH, BUT HE HASN'T BEEN AROUND IN A WHILE.
WHO'S THE OTHER?
CRIME BOSS CALLED TYGER TIGER. OWNS THIS PLACE, BUT DOESN'T HANG OUT HERE--SOMETHING ABOUT BAD MEMORIES.
SORRY.
KRAAK!
NO PROBLEM. WHERE DO I FIND HER?
NOW THIS IS JUST PLAIN RUDE.

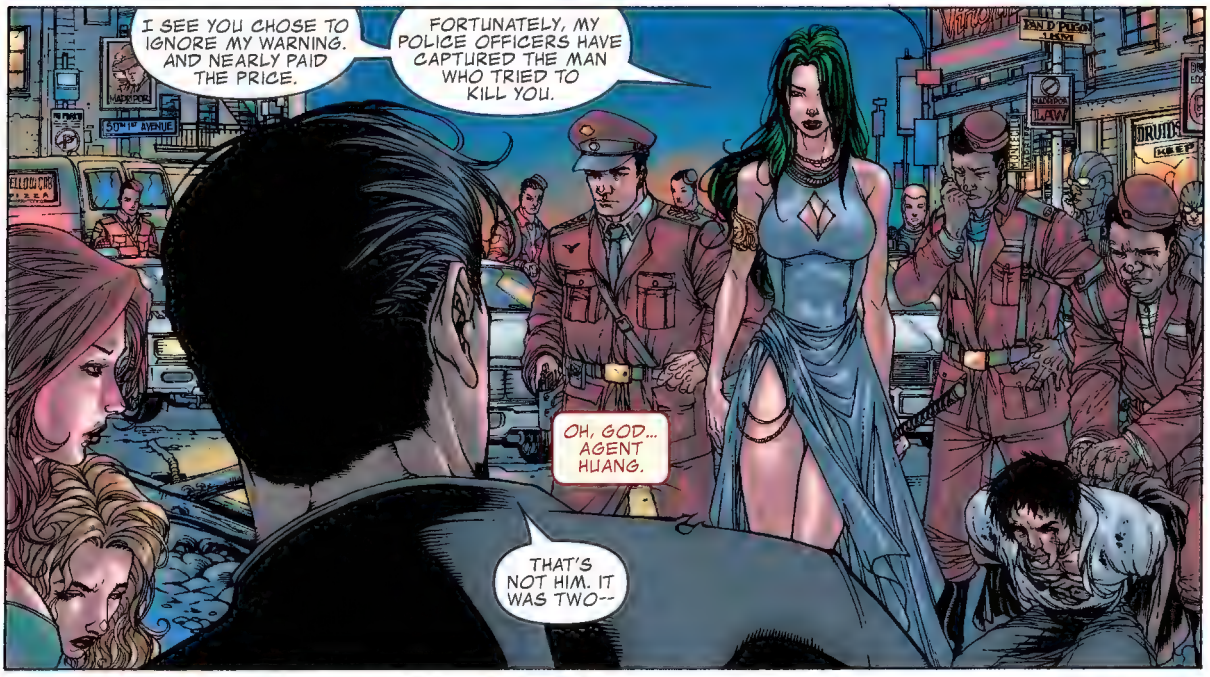
EVERYONE KNOWS YOU DON'T START A BAR FIGHT UNTIL ROUGHHOUSE SHOWS UP!
RRRUNCH
GET OUT OF HERE, HUANG. WE CAN'T RISK COMPROMISING YOU.
TROUBLE, BOSS. THAT'S ROUGHHOUSE-- LOCAL ASSASSIN FOR HIRE. HE'S A SUPERHUMAN.
I'D NOTICED.
IT GETS WORSE. MY GUESS IS HE'S JUST A DISTRACTION. HE WORKS WITH A PARTNER; A MASTER KILLER BY THE NAME OF--
--BLOODSCREAM!
SFTHUNK

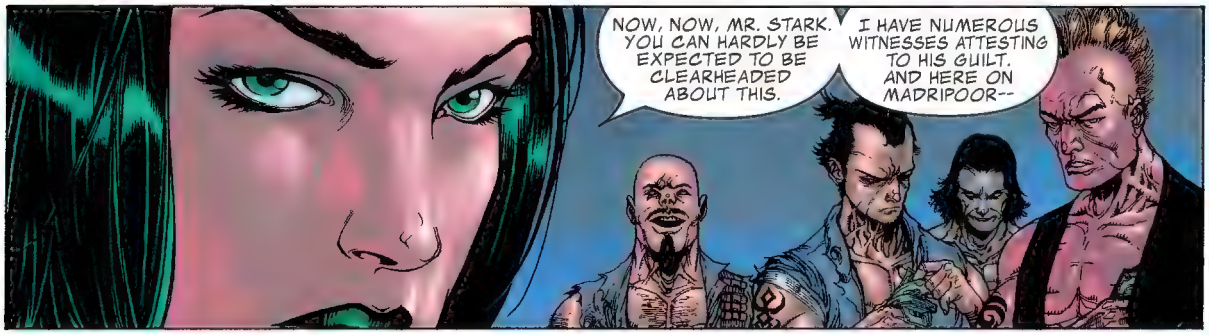

NAILS, DON'T--!
KRNCH
HAND-TO-HAND'S MY SPECIALTY, SIR. ONE PUNCH, ONE KILL.
AHH. YOU'RE FULL OF LIFE, MY PRETTY.
GET OFF HER!
GLADLY.
YOUR ESSENCE WILL FEED ME WELL.
EEAAGGHH!
YOU'RE AN EVEN FULLER MEAL.
SHRRIPP!

BLEED.
WHAT--?
THE UNDERSHEATH FOR MY ARMOR. I STORE IT IN THE HOLLOWS OF MY BONES AND EXTRUDE IT AT WILL.
CALL ME OLD-FASHIONED, BUT I DON'T LIKE MEN TOUCHING ME. ESPECIALLY ONES AS UGLY AS YOU.
IT'S TRUE. SOMETIMES THE OLD-FASHIONED WAYS *ARE* BEST.
LORD--!
HSSSS!
NNHH-- SPEAKING OF *OLD-FASHIONED*--

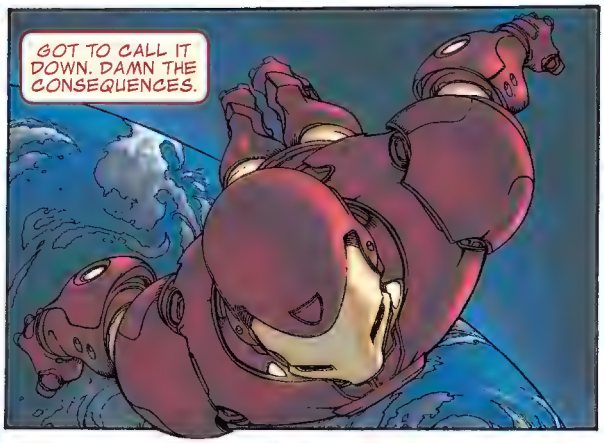
GGAKK--
...THE "FREON CAPSULE IN A BUTTON" TRICK GOES BACK TO OLD-SCHOOL S.H.I.E.L.D.
BUT SOMEHOW I DOUBT YOU APPRECIATE THE HISTORY.
RRUNNCCH
NOW YOU GONE AN' DONE IT.
IT COULDA BEEN QUICK AND CLEAN. BUT NOW...
...IT'S GOTTA GET NASTY.
DOWN!!
FOXY DEN STRIP BAR
BRRROOMMMM

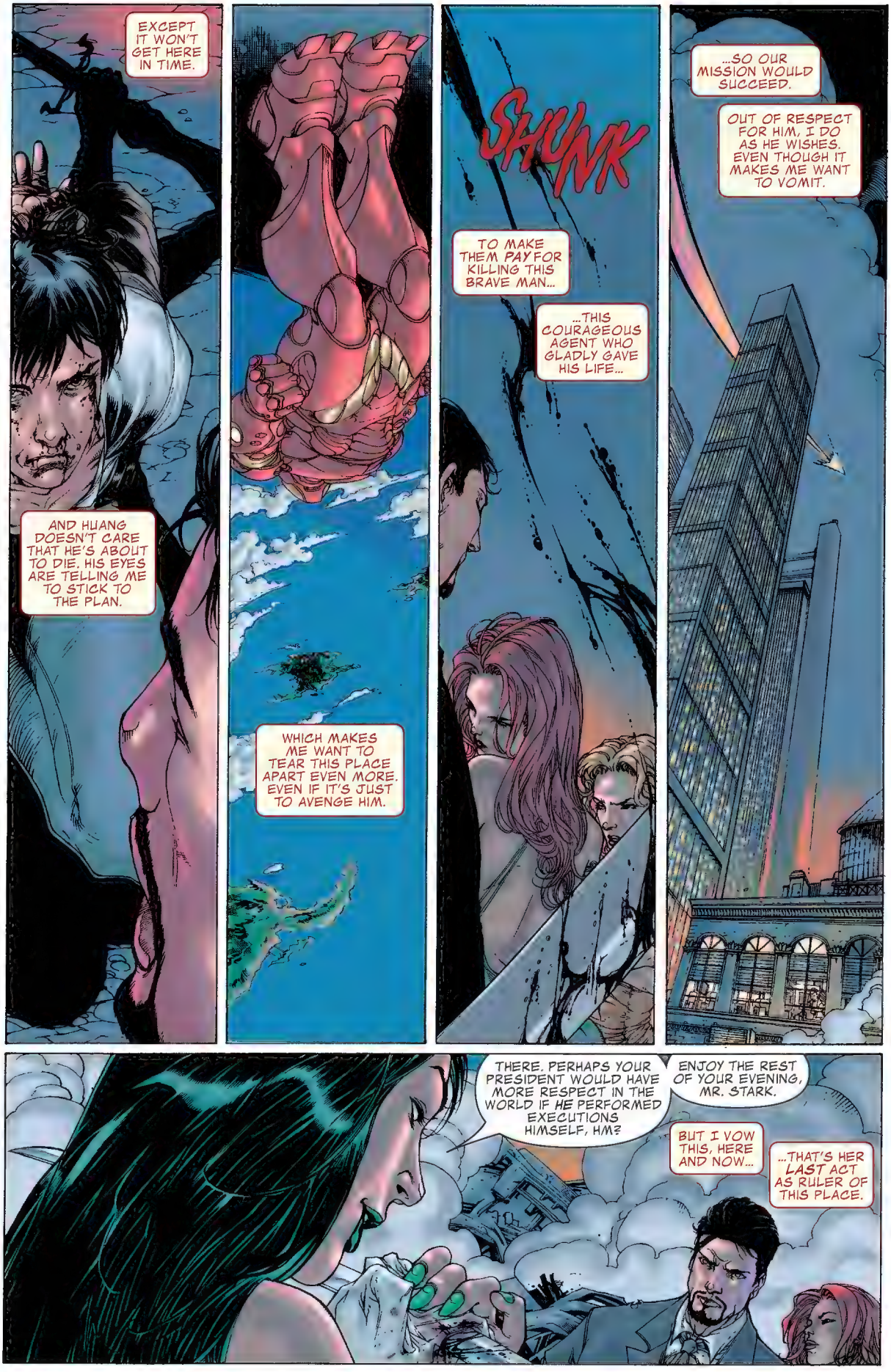

EVERYONE... ALL RIGHT?
I'M FINE. NAILS IS STILL WEAK.
AH, MR. STARK...

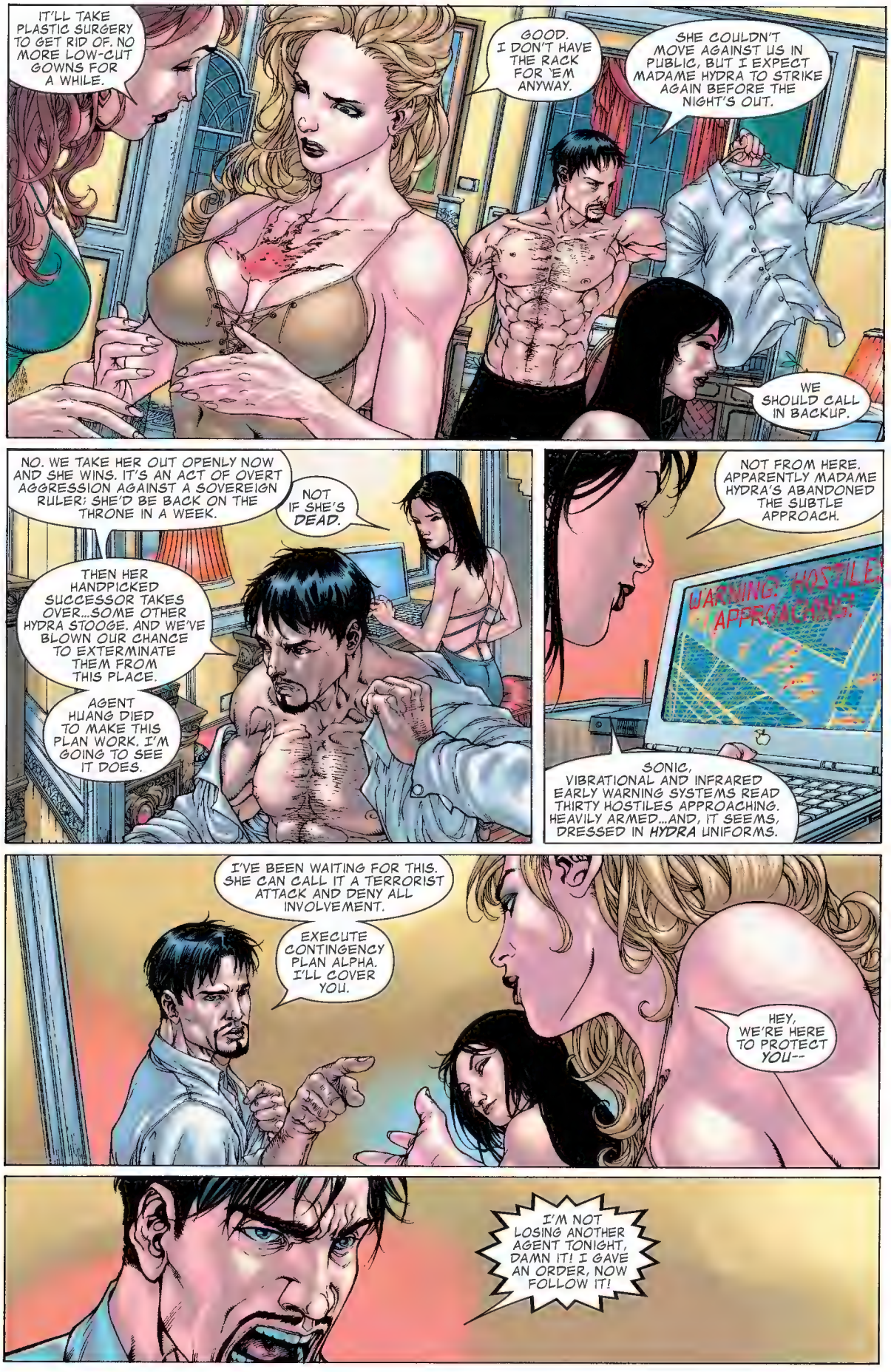

I SEE YOU CHOSE TO IGNORE MY WARNING. AND NEARLY PAID THE PRICE.
FORTUNATELY, MY POLICE OFFICERS HAVE CAPTURED THE MAN WHO TRIED TO KILL YOU.
OH, GOD... AGENT HUANG.
THAT'S NOT HIM. IT WAS TWO--
50TH AVENUE
MADRIPOOR
PAN D PUSSY
LAWS
LAW
DRUGS
MEEP

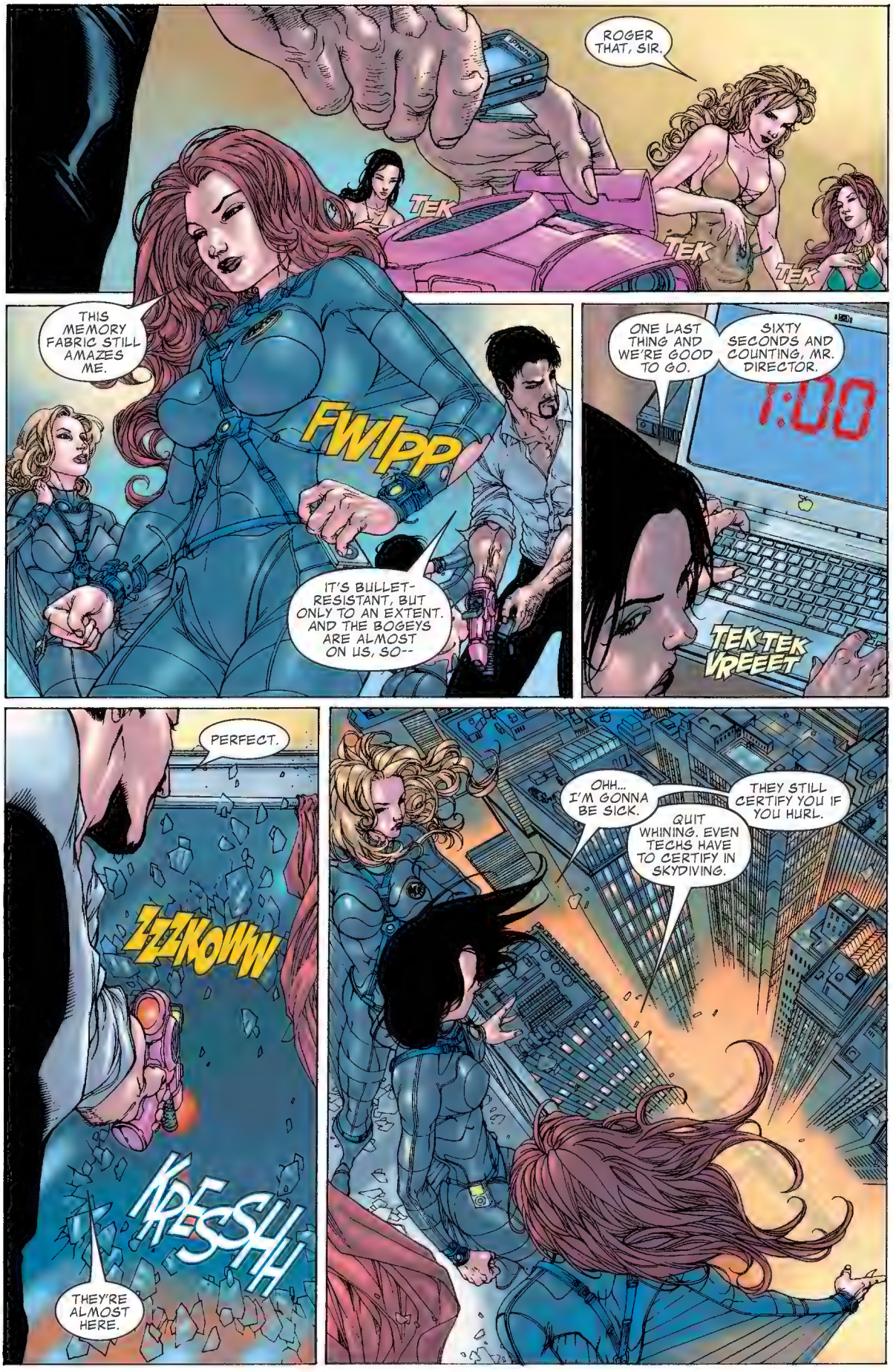

NOW, NOW, MR. STARK. YOU CAN HARDLY BE EXPECTED TO BE CLEARHEADED ABOUT THIS.
I HAVE NUMEROUS WITNESSES ATTESTING TO HIS GUILT. AND HERE ON MADRIPOOR--

--WE ARE-- WHAT'S THE EXPRESSION?-- "TOUGH ON CRIME."
MY ARMOR...


GOT TO CALL IT DOWN. DAMN THE CONSEQUENCES.

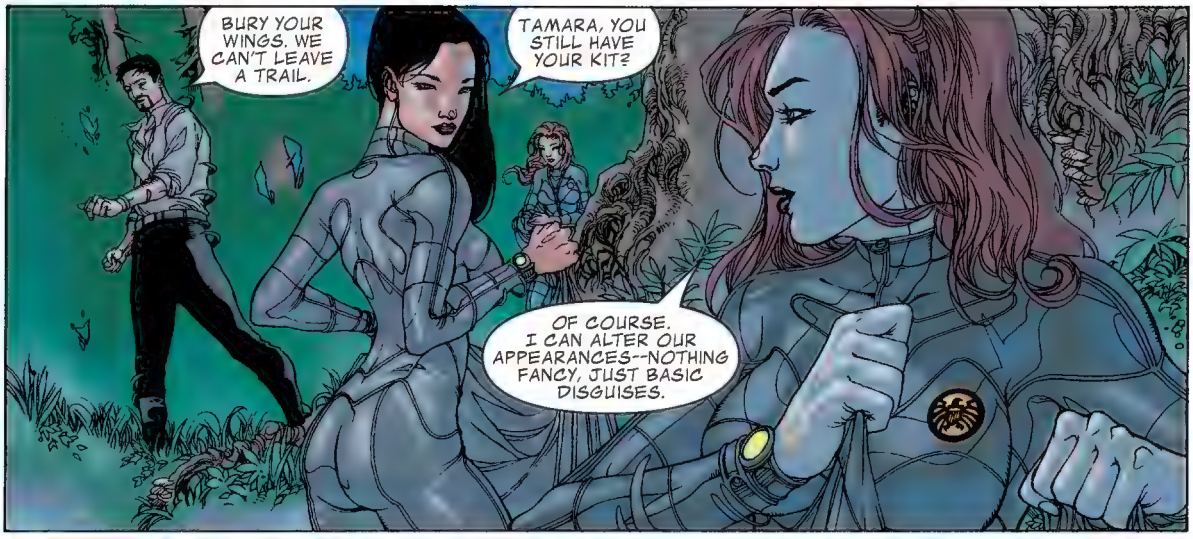

EXCEPT IT WON'T GET HERE IN TIME.
AND HUANG DOESN'T CARE THAT HE'S ABOUT TO DIE. HIS EYES ARE TELLING ME TO STICK TO THE PLAN.
WHICH MAKES ME WANT TO TEAR THIS PLACE APART EVEN MORE. EVEN IF IT'S JUST TO AVENGE HIM.
SHUNK
TO MAKE THEM PAY FOR KILLING THIS BRAVE MAN...
...THIS COURAGEOUS AGENT WHO GLADLY GAVE HIS LIFE...
...SO OUR MISSION WOULD SUCCEED.
OUT OF RESPECT FOR HIM, I DO AS HE WISHES. EVEN THOUGH IT MAKES ME WANT TO VOMIT.
THERE. PERHAPS YOUR PRESIDENT WOULD HAVE MORE RESPECT IN THE WORLD IF HE PERFORMED EXECUTIONS HIMSELF, HM?
ENJOY THE REST OF YOUR EVENING, MR. STARK.
BUT I VOW THIS, HERE AND NOW...
...THAT'S HER LAST ACT AS RULER OF THIS PLACE.


IT'LL TAKE PLASTIC SURGERY TO GET RID OF. NO MORE LOW-CUT GOWNS FOR A WHILE.
GOOD. I DON'T HAVE THE RACK FOR 'EM ANYWAY.
SHE COULDN'T MOVE AGAINST US IN PUBLIC, BUT I EXPECT MADAME HYDRA TO STRIKE AGAIN BEFORE THE NIGHT'S OUT.
WE SHOULD CALL IN BACKUP.
NO. WE TAKE HER OUT OPENLY NOW AND SHE WINS. IT'S AN ACT OF OVERT AGGRESSION AGAINST A SOVEREIGN RULER; SHE'D BE BACK ON THE THRONE IN A WEEK.
NOT IF SHE'S DEAD.
THEN HER HANDPICKED SUCCESSOR TAKES OVER...SOME OTHER HYDRA STOOGE. AND WE'VE BLOWN OUR CHANCE TO EXTERMINATE THEM FROM THIS PLACE.
AGENT HUANG DIED TO MAKE THIS PLAN WORK. I'M GOING TO SEE IT DOES.
NOT FROM HERE. APPARENTLY MADAME HYDRA'S ABANDONED THE SUBTLE APPROACH.
WARNING: HOSTILE APPROACHING
SONIC, VIBRATIONAL AND INFRARED EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS READ THIRTY HOSTILES APPROACHING. HEAVILY ARMED...AND, IT SEEMS, DRESSED IN HYDRA UNIFORMS.
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS. SHE CAN CALL IT A TERRORIST ATTACK AND DENY ALL INVOLVEMENT.
EXECUTE CONTINGENCY PLAN ALPHA. I'LL COVER YOU.
HEY, WE'RE HERE TO PROTECT YOU--
I'M NOT LOSING ANOTHER AGENT TONIGHT, DAMN IT! I GAVE AN ORDER, NOW FOLLOW IT!


ROGER THAT, SIR.
TEK
TEK
TEK
THIS MEMORY FABRIC STILL AMAZES ME.
FWIPP
IT'S BULLET-RESISTANT, BUT ONLY TO AN EXTENT. AND THE BOGEYS ARE ALMOST ON US, SO--
ONE LAST THING AND WE'RE GOOD TO GO.
SIXTY SECONDS AND COUNTING, MR. DIRECTOR.
1:00
TEK TEK VREEET
PERFECT.
ZZZKOWW
KRE-SHH
THEY'RE ALMOST HERE.
OHH... I'M GONNA BE SICK.
QUIT WHINING. EVEN TECHS HAVE TO CERTIFY IN SKYDIVING.
THEY STILL CERTIFY YOU IF YOU HURL.

GO!!
SHRAKK
HAIL HYDRA! IMMORTAL HYDRA! CUT OFF ONE--
SHUT UP.
--HURGH!
VRAMM
NOT QUITE MY ARMOR'S REPULSORS, BUT NOT BAD...
TEH
FWIPP
...AS A TEMPORARY MEASURE.

THEY'RE TOO FAR OFF-- GET THE SNIPER RIFLES UP HERE!
UM, SIR--
WE MAY HAVE A PROBLEM.
0:02
BEEEEP
KABOOM
WE'RE LOSING ALTITUDE!
MOST OF THIS ISLAND IS JUNGLE. HEAD FOR IT.
WE LAND ANYWHERE WITH PAVED ROAD AND WE'LL BE DEAD IN SECONDS.


BURY YOUR WINGS. WE CAN'T LEAVE A TRAIL.
TAMARA, YOU STILL HAVE YOUR KIT?
OF COURSE. I CAN ALTER OUR APPEARANCES--NOTHING FANCY, JUST BASIC DISGUISES.

GOOD. WE NEED TO GET BACK INTO THE CITY.
UNFORTUNATELY, WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME...AND HUANG NEVER GOT TO TELL ME HOW TO MAKE CONTACT WITH TYGER TIGER.

NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT THAT ANY LONGER.
BASIC LAW OF THE JUNGLE. YOU DON'T FIND THE TIGER...

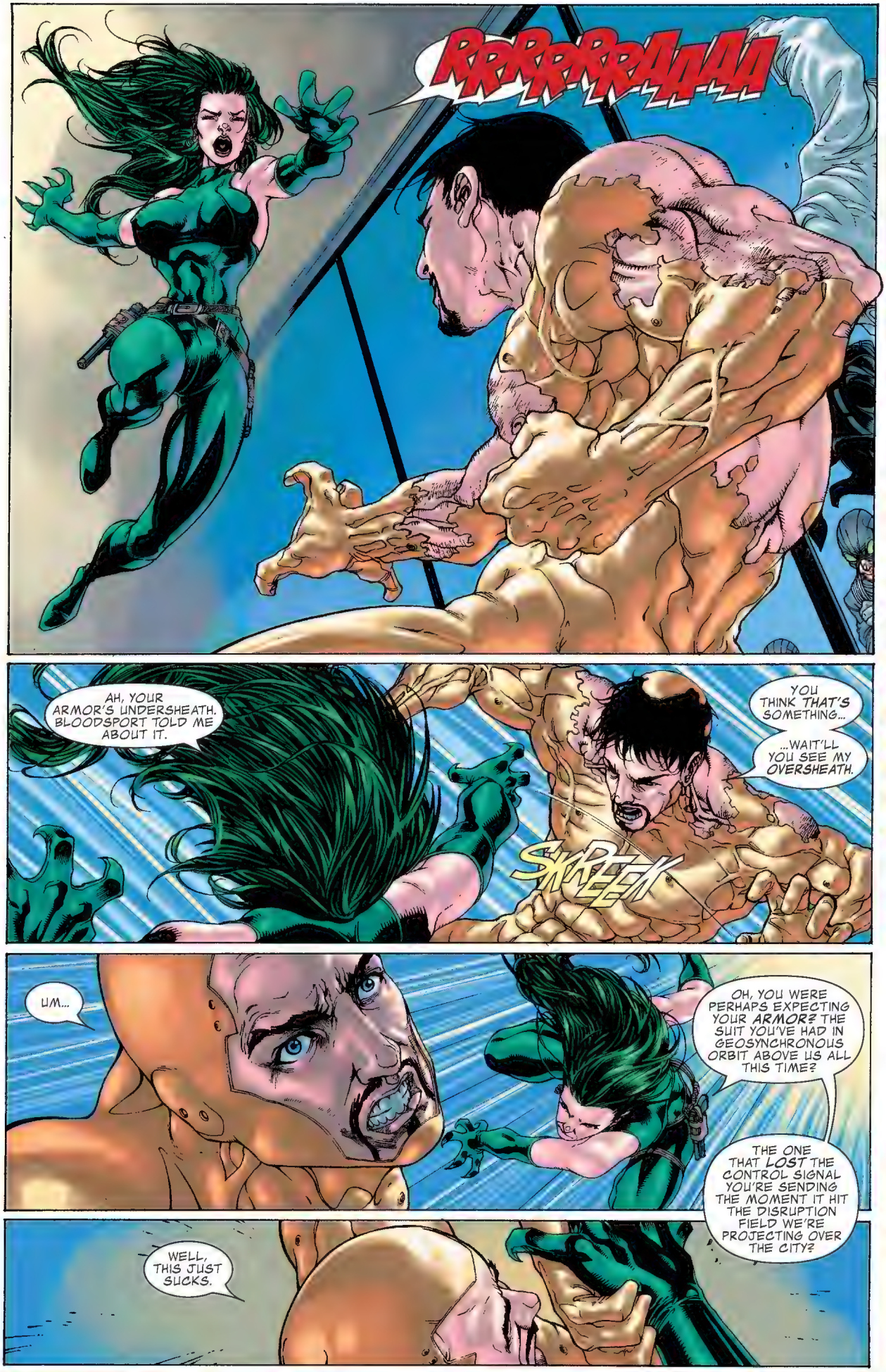
...THE TIGER FINDS YOU.

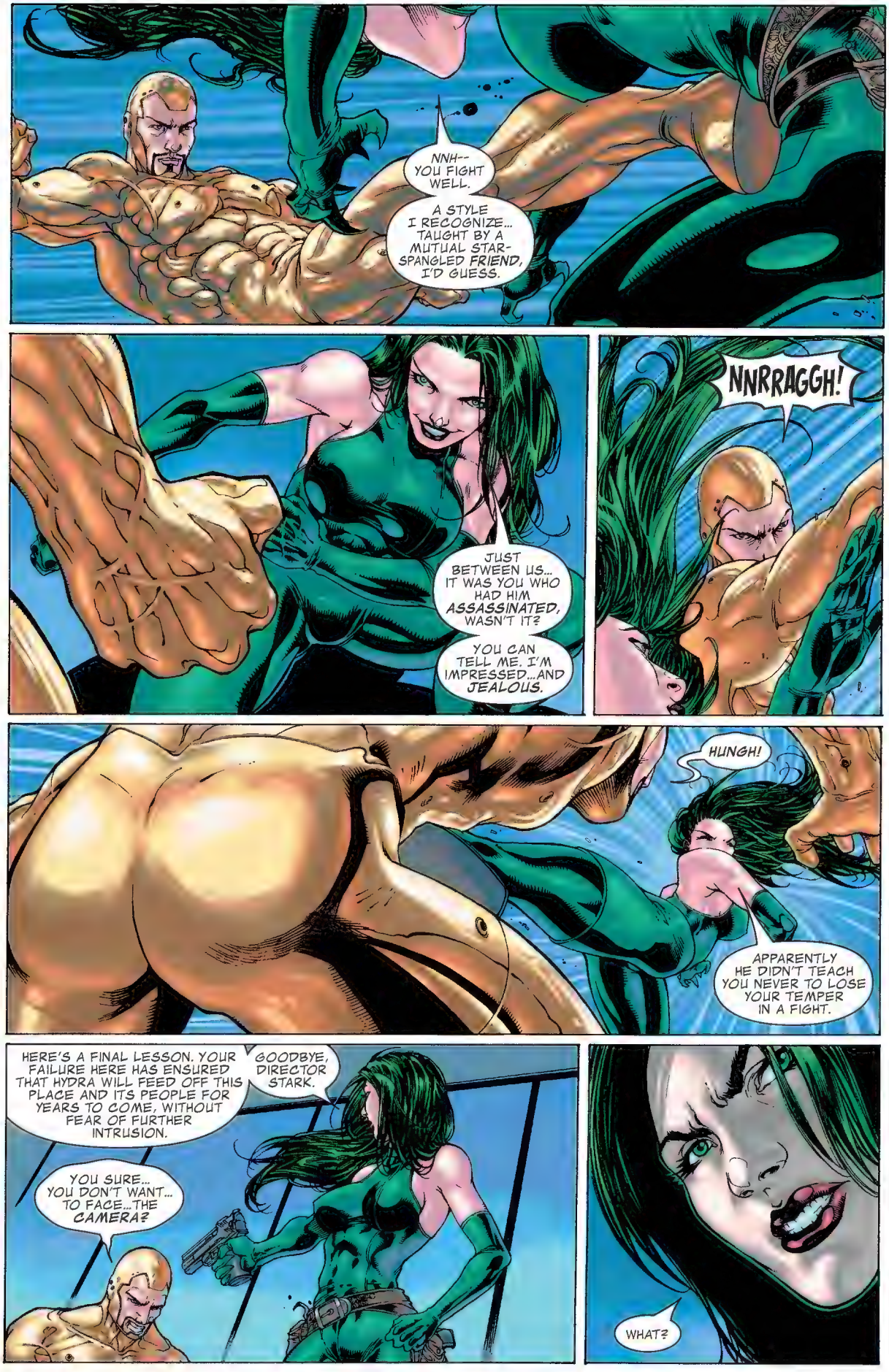
SOON...
WHAT YOU'RE SUGGESTING IS SUICIDE.
NOT IF YOU HAVE THE PEOPLE OF MADRIPOOR BEHIND YOU.
THE PEOPLE OF MADRIPOOR CARE SOLELY ABOUT THEMSELVES--
--AND THEIR PROFITS, LEGAL OR ILLEGAL. MADAME HYDRA'S BAD FOR BOTH.
THIS DEBATE IS ACADEMIC. MADAME HYDRA'S PROBABLY FIGURED OUT BY NOW THAT I'M REACHING OUT TO YOU, WHICH MAKES YOU A THREAT.
YOU'RE ALREADY MARKED FOR DEATH.
I COULD GIVE HER YOUR CORPSE AS A PEACE OFFERING.
THAT MIGHT BUY YOU TIME. BUT YOU KNOW HOW SHE THINKS. IT WON'T BE LONG.
THE TRUTH IS, I HATE WHAT THAT WITCH HAS DONE TO MADRIPOOR. BUT I HAVE NO WISH TO SEE S.H.I.E.L.D. OR AMERICA RUNNING MY COUNTRY EITHER.
THAT'S NOT OUR INTENTION. WE JUST WANT A RULER WHO ISN'T SUBSIDIZING TERRORISM. I GIVE YOU MY WORD ON THAT.
I STILL HAVE DOUBTS THAT WE CAN OVERTHROW HER WITHOUT MILITARY INTERVENTION.
IF THE PEOPLE OF MADRIPOOR CALL FOR CHANGE, S.H.I.E.L.D. CAN JUSTIFY PROVIDING AID. AND YOU KNOW THE TYPE OF AID I'M CAPABLE OF CALLING ON.
I NEED TO THINK ON THIS. YOU'LL HAVE MY ANSWER BY NIGHTFALL.

SO?
SHE'S THINKING ABOUT IT--WHICH WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR.
BUT I MIGHT BE ABLE TO EXPEDITE THE PROCESS. MADAME HYDRA'S INJECTION IS BLOCKING MY ABILITY TO CONTROL TECHNOLOGY...
...BUT I CAN STILL SENSE IT. AND I'M SENSING SOMETHING BIG NEARBY.
MADAME TIGER, IF YOU'LL ACCOMPANY ME, I THINK I MAY BE ABLE TO HELP YOU MAKE YOUR DECISION.
SHE'S GOING NOWHERE WITH YOU, OUTLANDER.
YOU CAN ESCORT HER, IF YOU LIKE. BUT I ASSURE YOU, THIS IS IMPORTANT.
WE'VE BEEN WALKING FOREVER. I HOPE THERE'S A POINT TO--
SHH. WE'RE ALMOST...
...HERE.

BY ALL THAT'S HOLY.
KNOWING HYDRA, IT'S PROBABLY JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG.
TELL ME WHAT I HAVE TO DO.
THIS IS WHAT YOUR COUNTRY'S BECOME, TYGER.

THE ROYAL PALACE OF MADRIPOOR
TAP! TAP!
HELLO. I'M TONY STARK.
IS MADAME HYDRA HOME?
HELLO, PRINCESS. I MUST SAY I'M SHOCKED--SHOCKED--TO FIND HYDRA AGENTS IN YOUR ROYAL PALACE.
WHAT IS IT ABOUT MADRIPOOR THAT MAKES EVERYONE USE THE SAME TIRED CASABLANCA REFERENCES?
WAIT, I HAVE A BETTER QUESTION. WE'VE SCANNED THE AREA; NO S.H.I.E.L.D. AGENTS, CRAFTS OR WEAPONS ARE NEARBY.
WHAT SUDDENLY MADE YOU SUICIDAL?
I GOT TIRED OF YOU SENDING OTHERS TO TRY TO KILL ME.
AND I FIGURE YOU FOR THE TYPE THAT CAN'T RESIST A CHALLENGE. SO...
...THINK YOU'RE WOMAN ENOUGH TO DO THE JOB YOURSELF?


RRRRRRRAAAA
AH, YOUR ARMOR'S UNDERSHEATH. BLOODSPORT TOLD ME ABOUT IT.
YOU THINK THAT'S SOMETHING...
...WAIT'LL YOU SEE MY OVERSHEATH.
SKREEK
UM...
OH, YOU WERE PERHAPS EXPECTING YOUR ARMOR? THE SUIT YOU'VE HAD IN GEOSYNCHRONOUS ORBIT ABOVE US ALL THIS TIME?
THE ONE THAT LOST THE CONTROL SIGNAL YOU'RE SENDING THE MOMENT IT HIT THE DISRUPTION FIELD WE'RE PROJECTING OVER THE CITY?
WELL, THIS JUST SUCKS.


NNH-- YOU FIGHT WELL.
A STYLE I RECOGNIZE... TAUGHT BY A MUTUAL STAR-SPANGLED FRIEND, I'D GUESS.
JUST BETWEEN US... IT WAS YOU WHO HAD HIM ASSASSINATED, WASN'T IT?
YOU CAN TELL ME. I'M IMPRESSED...AND JEALOUS.
NNRRAGGH!
HUNGH!
APPARENTLY HE DIDN'T TEACH YOU NEVER TO LOSE YOUR TEMPER IN A FIGHT.
HERE'S A FINAL LESSON. YOUR FAILURE HERE HAS ENSURED THAT HYDRA WILL FEED OFF THIS PLACE AND ITS PEOPLE FOR YEARS TO COME, WITHOUT FEAR OF FURTHER INTRUSION.
GOODBYE, DIRECTOR STARK.
YOU SURE... YOU DON'T WANT... TO FACE...THE CAMERA?
WHAT?

GREAT THING ABOUT MADRIPOOR--LOTS OF ELECTRONICS STORES.
SONY
SALE
AND THERE IS THAT WHOLE "GENIUS" THING IN MY BIO...
...BUT ENOUGH ABOUT ME. OVER TO YOU, TYGER.
P. ZAMORA 16
SHOP
MADRIPOOR
PEOPLE OF MADRIPOOR. YOU'VE HEARD YOUR PRINCESS' OWN ADMISSION OF HOW SHE VIEWS YOU.
AS LIVESTOCK. CHATTEL. TOOLS FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF HYDRA.
SHE IS NOT WORTHY TO RULE US.
BEER
EVEN NOW, MY MEN AND I MARCH ON THE PALACE. JOIN US!
"TAKE BACK YOUR COUNTRY!"

MADAME HYDRA, WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!
IT'S A MOB, NOT AN ARMY. KILL THE RINGLEADER--THAT TRAMP TYGER TIGER--AND THEY'LL DISPERSE.
GO WITH HIM, MEN.
I'LL JOIN YOU IN A MOMENT.
BLAM BLAM
DESERT EAGLE PATOL
PING
PING

KHOOM
Z-RAKK
TELEVISION. THE ULTIMATE DISTRACTION.
GAVE ME TIME TO BOUNCE MY COMMAND SIGNAL OFF SATELLITES. REACH MY ARMOR FROM ABOVE.

TAKE A LAST LOOK AT YOUR PALACE, PRINCESS.
BLOODSCREAM! ROUGHHOUSE! PROTECT YOUR SOVEREIGN!
--RIP THAT TIN CAN RIGHT OFF YOU, BY YMIR!
KLANG KTUNG
GIVEN TIME, YOU JUST MIGHT.
ASGARDIAN, EH? THAT EXPLAINS A LOT.
YOU DON'T TALK LIKE THOR.
PSYSIOLOGY: ASGARDIAN
DON'T FIGHT LIKE HIM EITHER.
SHRAKKK

NOW YOU'RE AN INTERESTING ONE. NOT QUITE A SUPERHUMAN, NOT QUITE A VAMPIRE.
I AM BLOODSCREAM. I AM THE UNDYING WARRIOR.
AND I AM YOUR END.
I DOUBT IT.
IF YOU HAD A HARD TIME LAYING YOUR DEATH-TOUCH ON ME BEFORE, YOU'RE REALLY OUT OF LUCK NOW.
FOOL! A HUNDRED HYDRA AGENTS HAVE WILLINGLY FED ME THEIR LIFE ESSENCE. THEIR STRENGTH IS NOW MINE.
I NEED NOT TOUCH YOUR FLESH TO KILL YOU.
KRRNNK
NNGH--IT SEEMS I UNDERESTIMATED YOU.
I WON'T DO IT AGAIN.
KRAKOOM

AND YET YOU HAVE, IDIOT. I CANNOT BE KILLED BY ANY WEAPON FORGED BY MORTAL MAN.
KHAKK... THANKS FOR CLEARING THAT UP.
HOW ABOUT FORGED BY A STARK ENTERPRISES ENGINEERING ROBOT?
SHNG
THUNK
I USUALLY USE THIS TO INTERFACE WITH OUTSIDE SYSTEMS.
BUT AS A 21ST-CENTURY STAKE...
...I THINK VAN HELSING WOULD APPROVE.

FIRE!
UH-OH. I WONDERED WHAT THAT THING DOES; GUESS I'M ABOUT TO FIND--
--AAAGGGHH!
THRUMMM
FEEL THAT... IN MY GUT...AND MY BRAIN...
IF NOT FOR MY SHIELDING...I'D BE LEAKING GRAY MATTER... FROM MY EARS.
CAN'T FOCUS... TO AIM...OR EVEN...LOCK ON TARGET...

ONLY GET... ONE SHOT.
BETTER PICK A PLACE... WHERE PRECISION...
WHOOM!
...ISN'T SO IMPORTANT.
RUMBLE
WAS A TIME I'D HAVE WONDERED IF THAT THING WAS SENTIENT. AWARE.
IF I'D JUST KILLED A NEW, UNIQUE FORM OF LIFE.
BUT THESE DAYS...
...I HAVE OTHER THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT.
MAYBE SOMEDAY I'LL HAVE THE LUXURY OF DECIDING HOW THAT MAKES ME FEEL.

NICE PLACE YOU HAVE HERE, PRINCESS.
NOT UNTIL TOMORROW'S CORONATION. UNTIL THEN, CALL ME TYGER.
AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, I CAN'T CALL YOU JESSAN?
YOU KNOW MY TRUE NAME?
PLEASE. WE'RE THE WORLD'S FOREMOST INTELLIGENCE AGENCY. YOU THINK WE DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND? YOUR HARVARD M.B.A.?
YOU THINK I BACKED YOU AS NEW RULER JUST BECAUSE OF YOUR PRETTY FACE?
FLATTER ALL YOU LIKE; I MEANT WHAT I SAID. I WILL NEVER BE YOUR PUPPET.
GOOD. PUPPETS NEED THEIR STRINGS PULLED. I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THAT.
I HAVE A WORLD TO WORRY ABOUT. WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR KINGDOM IS YOUR AFFAIR...UNTIL IT AFFECTS THE SAFETY OF THE WORLD. THEN IT BECOMES MY PROBLEM.
AND YOU'VE SEEN HOW I DEAL WITH MY PROBLEMS.
I DID. AND I WAS IMPRESSED.
YOU'VE IMPRESSED ME IN MOST RESPECTS SO FAR. I HOPE THAT'LL CONTINUE.
SO DO I. AND I'M GLAD YOUR CORONATION'S NOT 'TIL TOMORROW. SEE, I HAVE THIS RULE ABOUT HEADS OF STATE...
DEE DEE DEE
DAMN. I'M SORRY, JESSAN...I HAVE TO GO TO TRANSIA. MOUNT WUNDAGORE'S ALL LIT UP, AND THAT'S NEVER GOOD.
I UNDERSTAND.
CALL ME IF MADAME HYDRA RESURFACES. AND LET'S PICK THIS UP WHEN OUR LIVES ARE LESS INSANE.
NEVER IT IS, THEN.
FIN

TONY STARK'S LIFE HAS HIT ROCK BOTTOM.

His plans for the super hero Initiative have hit a tragic snag. His former flame, believed dead, is being manipulated by one of his deadliest enemies. Even to his strongest allies, Stark appears to be descending into a mental breakdown while everything around him swirls out of control. Now, with the lives of millions hanging in the balance, Iron Man must fight his way out of the darkness and prevent the Mandarin from releasing a plague that would change humanity as we know it!

Collecting *Iron Man #21-28* and *Iron Man: Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. Annual #1* — written by Daniel Knauf, Charlie Knauf and Christos Gage; and illustrated by Roberto De La Torre, Butch Guice, Carlo Paguylan and Harvey Tolibao.

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